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# THE HOUSE OF MOHUN

## GEORGE GIBBS

Fiction, American

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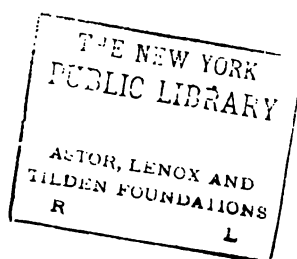


*The*  
**HOUSE OF MOHUN**

BY GEORGE GIBBS

THE HOUSE OF MOHUN  
YOUTH TRIUMPHANT  
THE VAGRANT DUKE  
THE SPLENDID OUTCAST  
THE BLACK STONE  
THE GOLDEN BOUGH  
THE SECRET WITNESS  
PARADISE GARDEN  
THE YELLOW DOVE  
THE FLAMING SWORD  
MADCAP  
THE SILENT BATTLE  
THE MAKER OF OPPORTUNITIES  
THE FORBIDDEN WAY  
THE BOLTED DOOR  
TONY'S WIFE  
THE MEDUSA EMERALD

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY  
Publishers New York







AT SOME OF THE TABLES NEAR BY THE FUN WAS NOW FURIOUS.

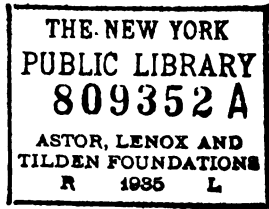
# *The* HOUSE OF MOHUN

BY  
GEORGE GIBBS

AUTHOR OF "YOUTH TRIUMPHANT," "THE SPLENDID  
OUTCAST," "THE YELLOW DOVE," ETC.



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**TO MY FRIEND**

**KARL E. HARRIMAN**

**IN APPRECIATION OF HIS CONSTRUCTIVE  
CRITICISM AND ENCOURAGEMENT**

**35X988**



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*The*  
**HOUSE OF MOHUN**





# THE HOUSE OF MOHUN

## CHAPTER I

### THE VISITOR FROM MARS

**I**T was a gay party and its members were all young. At least they were young in years, though compact of the vices and virtues of the age, the essence, so to speak, of the fruit of the tree, the cider of life, flavored rather highly with the vinegar of experience.

The place was the octagonal terrace of the Braebank Country Club on Long Island, the season early Autumn, the hour that of the approach to the Nineteenth Hole, in which the elect conspired by devious ways to defeat the aspirations of the Eighteenth Amendment.

If the girls of the party were not all strictly beautiful nature had endowed them graciously enough, and what nature had neglected art had supplied and was even at the very moment in the act of supplying, for vanity case and mirror were constantly in evidence. Pouting lips were being tinted daintily and small noses dabbed from time to time with tiny white objects which emerged and disappeared into mysterious recesses of silken sweaters or silk waists. These were merely feminine gestures, and meant nothing more depraved than an intense vitality, seeking expression in

## THE HOUSE OF MOHUN

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this form of coquetry, which said, "I am lovely. But if I am not lovely enough, behold! Let me please you more." Careless gestures if you like, but at once a challenge and a reproach to those members of the other sex who amusedly watched the proceeding.

Two men sat at a table near by, just finishing an atrocious mixture of sarsaparilla and lime juice. The older man with more humor than delicacy had averred that it tasted "like the old family tooth-brush." But the afternoon had been warm and their thirst had been impelling so that now George Lycett composed himself to a cigar, his blithe optimism triumphant over his enforced abstention. Lycett was of the banker type—bald, affable, and highly colored, of the age which young people call old and old people call young.

To set the age of his younger companion is a more difficult matter, for though certainly under thirty his tortoise-shell spectacles gave Dr. David Sangree an air of owl-like sagacity which went strangely with his boyish smile. His eager eyes were, at present, scanning the party of young people which he found both colorful and informing. Neither of these men spoke. Indeed had they been in the mood for conversation the riot of laughter at the adjoining table would have made thought impossible.

The center of interest in the merry group was a young girl in a crimson sweater. She was a fine creature, too gorgeous to be called pretty, and too alluring to be called handsome. She was tall and well made, but the fine proportions of her youthful figure were somewhat marred by the slouching position in

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which she held her body. Her hair was a ruddy brown, bobbed well below the ears, over which her broad-brimmed hat sat at a rakish angle almost concealing one eye. But her omniscience seemed to have lost nothing by this handicap, for, if Argus boasted of a hundred eyes, "Cherry" Mohun looked a hundred ways with one eye and a half. Like her sisters she was daintily tinted, but her nose was just a trifle straighter, her lips more delicately chiseled, her laughter more pleasing. David Sangree caught the blue flash of her eye for a second in one of her Argus glances which passed on to the young man by her side whose entire happiness, it seemed, was hanging on her smile. And, as the visitor still looked, the girl crossed her knees carelessly, revealing in the act the fact that her stockings were rolled down, boy-scout fashion, from her knees.

Sangree stared, while Cherry Mohun tapped her cigarette on the back of her hand and lighted it carelessly from the match her companion held for her.

"It seems," said Dr. Sangree, "that some water has gone under the bridge since I was last in America."

Lycett smiled. "Quite so. Much water. And it's not even the same bridge. You remind me, somehow, Sangree, of Macaulay's New Zealander gazing on the ruins of London."

George Lycett was satisfied with the aptness of his figure of speech, for David Sangree had been out of America for nearly six years and was, to all intents and purposes, the visitor from Mars.

The younger man's gaze was still turned toward the young person who had attracted his attention.

## THE HOUSE OF MOHUN

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"Rather splendid ruins, Mr. Lycett," he said with a laugh. "Who is she? I mean," he added, "the one with the crimson sweater and the big hat."

"Oh, that's Cherry Mohun," said Lycett, "daughter of Jim Mohun."

"Oh, you don't mean the Mohun who——"

"Precisely. Jim Mohun's daughter."

"H—m. *Débutante?*"

"To be. This fall."

"Typical, I should say, and quite up to the minute," replied Sangree dryly.

"You mean the cigarette—the immodesty——?"

"I didn't wish to infer——"

"My dear David, when every one's immodest no one's immodest. Modesty was an Early Victorian convention which exaggerated the importance of the unrevealed. When the hidden is put in evidence it ceases to be interesting. Hence calves of legs instead of pantalets; hence the breast, instead of the cuirass of steel and bone sometimes known as the corset."

David Sangree mused as he listened to fragments of speech from the adjoining table. "It doesn't seem as though their conversation came in pantalets either," he said.

"And yet you can't help admiring its frankness."

David Sangree mused for a moment.

"The tea table of my younger days seemed a more decorous affair," he said slowly.

George Lycett laughed. "My dear innocent," he replied, "the tea of commerce is no fit drink for the younger gods of Nineteen Twenty. Ambrosia for them,

## THE VISITOR FROM MARS

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born of a Thermos bottle which your Hebe has just poured into the teapot at the angle in the wall. In short, the innocent teacups which you observe contain nothing less than that decoction once popularly known as the 'Orange Blossom cocktail.' And if I were honest I'd admit that I'd much prefer it to the abominable affair with which I've insulted your vitals and my own."

Sangree, making a wry face, set his empty glass down. "Of all your arguments, I like your last the best. But I fancy it's going to be difficult to adjust myself to the customs of my country."

The older man smiled. "You must follow the tide," he said.

Sangree shrugged, his brows tangling above his black-rimmed glasses. "It would be—er—amusing if it weren't—er—tragic." He leaned suddenly across the table, as though to exchange a great confidence, whispering,

"Do you know, Mr. Lycett, some friends asked me to a dance at a hotel in town last night. At the cloak-room window, two very pretty girls were checking their stays unwrapped, as calmly as you or I would check a hat. I was informed that the boys preferred to dance with them—ah—ungirdled."

"Quite true, I believe," said Lycett grinning.

"These seemed—er—nice girls, Mr. Lycett. It's rather puzzling."

"My boy, the corset began slipping years ago—in by inch. The war gave it its *coup de grâce*. The corset has to-day become a girdle—to-morrow it will

## THE HOUSE OF MOHUN

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be a myth. The young woman of to-day wants no stays—physically or otherwise. She is self-sufficient.”

“Well, rather. But you must admit it’s rather—er—disturbing to have one’s ideals of womanhood—one’s—er—fondest memories violated by these young—er—iconoclasts.”

George Lycett could scarcely repress a smile at the ingenuousness of his companion. “I would advise you not to use so big a word with a *débutante*. She wouldn’t know what you were talking about.”

“I won’t,” said David Sangree dryly. “I’m not going kidnapping.”

“It might repay you, my boy. You would find that the average *débutante* could teach you more of life itself in twenty minutes than you could learn in twenty years among the vestiges of forgotten races.”

“I don’t doubt it,” said Sangree with a smile. “That’s just my quarrel with—er”—he waved a definite hand—“with this sort of thing. To know life one must have lived it. It seems a pity,” he added, as though in an afterthought as he gazed at the other table, “because they’re so young and so flowerlike.”

George Lycett grew serious now. The idealism of the younger man had touched him.

“We all live too fast,” he muttered. “But what can one do?” he finished with a shrug. “These children are out of leading strings.”

“Why? Have they no mothers?”

Lycett threw back his head with a dry laugh. “Bless your heart! Helpless! God knows the last thing in America mother wants is to see her daughter

## *THE VISITOR FROM MARS*

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unpopular. So she puts on a pair of moral blinkers and goes off and plays bridge."

"I see," said the younger man thoughtfully. "And the fathers?" he added.

"The American father is too busy to notice. Busy and incurious. He leaves the matter to his wife. It never occurs to him to question the habits of the women of his household. The mother runs society—the daughter runs the mother. So there you are. If you told the average American father that he was making it quite possible for his daughter to go to the devil, he would tell you to go there yourself."

"He's a fool, then," said David.

"No, my boy, you can't altogether blame him. He errs from pride, affection and confidence. Quite admirable and human traits in themselves, you'll admit. Take Jim Mohun, for instance. Idolizes his daughter. Anything she does is right. In fact she makes anything right by the mere act of doing it. He's proud of her. She's devilish pretty. And he'd kill the man who whispered a word against her."

David Sangree shrugged. "Let me reassure you," he said dryly, "I have no opinions to express to Mr. Mohun."

Lycett knocked the ash from his cigar with the sober air of one granting absolution.

"My dear David," he said, "please permit me the license of an older man when I say that the study of ancient civilizations has made you just a trifle stodgy, and lately in the Near East you have looked too long into the faces of unhappy people. Joy as expressed



## THE HOUSE OF MOHUN

in the antics of healthy young animals like these shocks your sense of the fitness of things. But they've all done their bit. Cherry Mohun there drove an ambulance in Paris. The boy talking to her is Dick Wilberforce, the American Ace of Aces. Jack Spencer, the young fellow opposite, won a hat full of medals. The girl in the yellow sweater is Phoebe Macklin. She was in the Red Cross, Emergency Aid, and all the rest of it. Worked like a Trojan. And so on with the others. They gave everything they had, and it was a good deal. Now they've grown indifferent. They say—and rightly too—that their mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers have had a whack at running the world and have messed the job. Now they expect us to get out of the trouble the best way we can. But they won't help. I can't blame 'em. We *have* made a mess of it," he finished.

There was a commotion at the other table, a clamoring of voices as teacups were raised in appeal to the young lady in the crimson sweater, for Cherry Mohun, now standing, held the teapot at arm's length above her.

"A small dividend is declared," she laughed, ignoring the importunities. "Behave yourself, Jack. Down, Dicky. I swear that neither of you shall have a drop."

"Oh, I say——"

"I mean it. Not a drop. You've had enough." Her glance passed over their heads and met Mr. Lycett's. Perhaps Lycett looked thirsty. Evidently she thought so, for with an air of decision she eluded

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the importunities of her companions and quickly crossed to the smaller table. Both men rose.

"Dear Mr. Lycett," she said, "won't you come to the rescue? Dicky has to drive me home and he's so used to flying in the air that he forgets there are trees and things. And Jack has had more than enough already. But I don't want to waste it. Won't you?"

She nodded prettily to them both.

George Lycett was already holding out his empty glass.

"Cherry! You angel child," he laughed. "Will I? Won't I! So will Sangree. Oh, I forgot. You haven't met Dr. Sangree, have you? Famous scientist. Stranded in the East when the war broke out. Been with the Near East Relief. Please be kind to him. He's even thirstier than I am."

"How do you do?" said Miss Mohun, while she poured the insidious Orange Blossom which masqueraded as Orange Pekoe.

At closer range, David Sangree was aware of a swift, careless glance of appraisal from the Argus glance which passed quickly to Mr. Lycett. And in that glance he had a sense of being swiftly appraised, catalogued, and labeled. She would have none of him. The bent shoulders, the studious air, the tortoise-shell glasses belonged to one who clung close to the earth. What had he in common with these others who clove the air, and killed gloriously in the lust of battle? The thing that impressed him most about her was her intense vitality. He realized from the natural color of her lips and cheeks that the rouge stick and the

## *THE HOUSE OF MOHUN*

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powder ball were mere accessories of the feminine trade, a part of the technic of enchantment, which she might well have forsworn. And yet subtly she irritated him. She was so self-sufficient.

George Lycett had succumbed at once to her generosity. She was, it seemed, one of his favorites.

"There's no greater compliment than that paid by Beauty to Age," he said gracefully.

"Oh, thanks," said the girl carelessly. "But you needn't accuse me of politeness. I'm not polite. If you don't finish this, Dicky will. And when Dicky drinks he never knows when to stop."

Lycett drank and then murmured, "It's really pathetic how dependent prohibition has made us upon the munificence of our friends. How is your mother, my dear? As beautiful as ever?"

"Mother!" Cherry Mohun shrugged in a bored way. "Good Lord, yes. It's her specialty."

She was sitting on the table now swinging her legs. "I'm coming out this fall. I've got to—I'm twenty. Mother put it off as long as she could. She says it puts her on the shelf. As if anything could do that! But I'm not keen about it. It's a rotten bore to have to be so terribly pleased about everything. You'll come to my tea, though, won't you?"

"Well, rather. I'm a hardy perennial. Age cannot wither, et cetera."

"Age! Nobody's old any more."

"And nobody's young, my dear. You youngsters have toppled from the nursery steps directly upon the hard pavement of Life."

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"Yes," said the girl, toying with the teapot, "that's so. I feel a hundred already. And then almost fiercely, "But I do love life. Don't you?"

"If I didn't," said Mr. Lycett, "I shouldn't be here."

This conversation had completely eliminated David Sangree who stood, shifting from one foot to the other and marveling at the personal quality in Cherry Mohun's remarks. She was as downright as the noon-day sun.

"I do wish, Cherry, that you'd pay some attention to David Sangree," said Lycett, who had noted his companion's discomfiture. "He has been trying to offer you a health for at least four minutes."

"Oh, I beg pardon——"

"He's a friend of your father and one of our most distinguished ethnologists. Before the war——"

"What on earth is that?" asked Cherry, for the first time fixing Sangree with her blue gaze.

"An ethnologist, my dear, is a person who studies the *habitat* and customs of the different races and families of the earth. Dr. Sangree——"

"How terribly interesting," said Cherry listlessly, and then with a laugh, "I hope he won't want to make a study of the Mohun family."

"At least one member of it would repay," said David Sangree in his stilted way.

She glanced at him earnestly. This queer creature was actually saying something nice. Funny! A moment ago he had looked a hundred. Now when he smiled he seemed much younger than herself. And

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his eyes, even through their goggles, were rather compelling.

"You wouldn't find me worth while," she said dryly, trying quite hard to be polite. "Would he, Mr. Lycett?"

"That depends. I've just been telling him that he needs livening up. I fancy a study at close range of a *débutante* of this year would be something of a liberal education in the *habitat* and customs of the tribe of Manhattan, in the year of grace Nineteen Twenty.

Cherry Mohun laughed. "I like *that*," she said with a shrug.

"You needn't pay much attention to what Mr. Lycett says," put in Sangree quietly. "Besides, I don't dare to hope you'd care what my opinions were."

"Oh, I don't know. They might be worth while," she said indifferently. "Do come in some Sunday afternoon for tea. Bring him, Mr. Lycett. Mother will be pleased. She likes—" She paused in a new glance of appraisal as though she had thought of a word and then changed her mind. "She likes different sorts of people," she finished.

"Thanks," said David Sangree, "I shall be delighted."

Cherry Mohun swung her feet and slid down from the table, seizing the teapot. "Well, good-by Mr. Lycett. Don't be too severe on the younger tribes of Manhattan. They're doing the best they can. I've got to go and help keep this lot in order. They're getting restless. I'm going to walk Dicky around until he

## *THE VISITOR FROM MARS*

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wears off. Not Dicky, but you know. Good-by, Dr. —er—”

“Sangree.”

“Dr. Sangree. Mother will be delighted. She likes people with goggles. She runs her lion’s den on Sunday afternoons. Do come and roar for her.”

David Sangree sank into his chair, watching their visitor as she rejoined her companions and presently made good her promise of “walking Dicky around.” When at last the younger crowd had passed with some commotion out of earshot, Lycett with a smile glanced at his companion who was slowly turning over the fragments of ice in his empty glass with a long spoon. If he had expected to find the plot of the Human Comedy in the lingering aroma of Miss Cherry Mohun’s Orange Blossom cocktail he at once gave up the effort.

“What was the use of that?” he asked aloud of no one in particular.

Lycett laughed. “You mean her rudeness? I think she was afraid she might have made too good an impression,” he said whimsically.

“No—you’re mistaken,” said the younger man slowly. “I don’t think she could possibly have thought that. Because she didn’t make a good impression and she’s too clever not to know it. And I’m just stupid enough to imagine that her ill-manners were aimed at me.”

“Perhaps,” laughed Lycett. “But I rather think you flatter yourself. Cherry is the product of her times. Thank the War. But she can be adorable when she likes.”

## *THE HOUSE OF MOHUN*

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"H—m," said David Sangree. "You seem to be on tolerably intimate terms with the Mohun family."

"Oh, yes, of course. The friendship began in a business way, you know—over your affairs and my own. But Mrs. Mohun is the prettiest woman in New York."

"Ah, I see—" said Sangree slowly.

"Nothing like that, my boy. Quite a wonderful person. You'll know what I mean as soon as you see her."

"They are very rich, of course."

"Oh, yes. He's one of the wonders of the age. Theirs is the big place with the white columns just back of Oyster Bay. Nowadays prosperity is reckoned by the number of servants one keeps. The Mohun's have about thirty—when they can get 'em. Such luxury is impressive, you know, in a promoter of large enterprises. And then, you see—his wife has social ambitions."

"Oh, I see. I feel a certain curiosity about the mother of such a daughter."

"And not a little about the daughter herself?" Lycett laughed as he rose and took up his golf clubs. "David, I must take you to roar for them."

"God forbid!" said Dr. Sangree, blinking through his spectacles.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MOHUN FAMILY

**T**HE Mohun family had emerged from partial obscurity in the years immediately preceding the Great War, when Jim Mohun's first million dollars (by long odds the hardest to get) had produced, through fortunate ventures, other millions almost overnight. The small town, a short distance west of Pittsburgh, from which the Mohuns had migrated to New York, was very proud of the achievements of its native son. The house in which the Mohuns had lived, a square, frame affair with a cupola at the top of its geometric center, was pointed to with pride as the former residence of Jim Mohun, the financial wizard. And the cast-iron deer, which faced the beholder on each side of the graveled path that led to the front porch of the old house, still stood expectant as though awaiting the great man's return.

But Jim Mohun had long ago outgrown those provincial shades. And Alicia Mohun looked back from the splendid perfection of her show-place near Oyster Bay with gentle shudderings at the memory of those expectant deer.

It was true that, when they were first married, the house at Lieperville had seemed a very splendid place, for Jim Mohun's fortune was then rated only in the thousands and in very few of those. But Mrs. Mohun



## *THE HOUSE OF MOHUN*

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was very proud of the fact that her mother was a Van Wyck and later, when social ambition became the actuating motive of her life, managed to use that family connection with an adroitness which paved the way that her husband's growing fortune had already blasted through the social wilderness.

The move to Long Island had been a shrewd one, for this was the backdoor into New York Society, and before the children had grown through adolescence the progress of this family was duly noted and the name of Mohun recorded as being "among those present" at the dinner tables of the elect. Alicia Mohun made few mistakes. She had the social instinct and she had beauty—assets of importance, when reinforced by a steadily growing income and a desire to please. The value of beauty in a woman's face, when added to other personal charms, can never be lightly considered. A beautiful woman at once creates an audience. She takes the center of the stage. Hostesses want her as a part of the decoration of their dinner tables, and any man has a dead soul, indeed, who isn't gratified at being in her presence. If she sparkles for him, he feels that he has a part in enhancing her beauty. If he provokes her smile, or her blush, he sees in these manifestations new beauties which he himself has painted. Beauty in a woman is in itself almost equal to power, but a clever beautiful woman is omnipotent.

Realizing the full value of these assets with which Nature had endowed her, Alicia Mohun played the social game with a skill which at times somewhat be-

## *THE MOHUN FAMILY*

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wildered her husband who found himself, almost before he was aware of it, an habitué of the houses of the near-great and a member of at least one exclusive club. His own knowledge of the world did something for him here, for, though he had none of the finer perceptions which distinguished his wife, he was manly, good looking in rather a heavy way and had sense enough, when at a disadvantage to remain silent.

But it was his wife who bridged these difficulties, ignoring with a graceful confidence the snubs of the snobbish, mounting the social ladder by climbing nimbly over the shoulders of various circles of acquaintances, conquering old prejudices and winning new favors with a tireless attention to the amenities and a succession of subtle campaigns of advertising which kept her name and face in evidence at bazaars, show-rings and hunt-meets. She cultivated the society writers, did them judicious favors, always consented to be interviewed and provided the poor things with copy with an air of conferring a favor. There were pictures, too, of herself, of the children, now grown very handsome too, of the place at Oyster Bay, exterior and interior; of the stables and the hunters which her son Jack and her daughter Margot rode to the hounds. Very prettily, in the familiar chat of a society magazine which devoted a part of its pages each month to well-known people, was told the story of how Margot, the daughter, had been called Chérie by her French governess and how that affectionate appellation had been Americanized to "Cherry" by

## *THE HOUSE OF MOHUN*

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members of the family and the circle of immediate friends, a title to which she seemed so suited that it clung to her through all the adolescent years.

Jim Mohun watched with good-natured tolerance this surprising progress of the family upward through the fringe of society and at last into its very woof and warp, but he interposed no objections, footing the bills growing greater each year. He realized that the social affiliations which his wife was bringing him had added value to his business connections, which increased yearly in prestige. But, as the years went on and the demands of his many interests grew more exacting, he was content to leave the control of his social destinies entirely in the hands of the author of them and to devote more and more of his time to the accumulation of the large sums of money which were required to pay the new obligations he had thus assumed.

Sometimes, perhaps, memories of the cast-iron deer on the shady lawn at Lieperville assailed him. It had been very quiet there. He had always worked hard in his Pittsburgh office, but not so hard that he couldn't reach home in time for a romp with the children before dinner. And there had been evenings then which he could spend with the whole family around the evening lamp, go to bed early and awake refreshed the next morning to the business of the day.

Now, it seemed, he was hardly ever refreshed. His nights as well as his days were filled with business conferences and, when these were lacking, there was his wife waiting to conduct him to some formal dinner

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or to some box at the opera, when all he wanted was to snooze in an easy-chair as in the old days, over a trade paper or a book—and so to bed. As it was, he scarcely saw his wife on terms of familiarity. She was always in the act of preparation for some social affair at home or abroad or else full-panoplied in fine raiment—too gorgeous a vision to be considered so commonplace a fact as a mere wife, or else too weary from her social triumphs to act as one. The time had come when he stood a little in awe of her, a little in awe too of his children, who, emulating the example of their superior mother, carried on the social standard of the Mohun family to the very seats of the mighty.

Of the children Jim Mohun now saw little, for Jack had been at Yale and Cherry at a fashionable boarding school up the river. But each new occasion when he met them seemed to strengthen the belief that, if a trifle spoiled, they were very remarkable children, quite superior in fact to any others of their acquaintance, for, in addition to personal beauty which they took from their mother, they had inherited a little of his own definiteness and much of his magnetism. And so Jim Mohun was quite willing to believe what other people told him—that his wife was the most capable as well as the most beautiful woman in New York.

The town house, though not large, was in a fashionable neighborhood and decorated with those colors which comported best with the burnished gold of Alicia Mohun's hair. Her hair had always been rather gorgeous and the threads of gray which had appeared

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upon her temples were banished by means of a secret process known only to herself and her maid. But she was wise enough not to make the mistake of "doing it all over," as so many women of her set had done, and trusted to its natural vitality to preserve the wave and color. The youthfulness of her figure and face, which deceived so many as to her exact age, was the result of habits of abstemiousness, regular massage and the use of various unguents, the ingredients of which not even her own daughter knew. Her face was her religion, and many were the secret hours spent upon the ritual of regeneration.

But the real secret of her perpetual youth lay in the nice adjustment of her mental processes, for beginning with the theory that it is worries which age one and not the years, she permitted no thought to enter her head which would cause her the least anxiety or dismay. She did not permit herself even the luxury of pity, all of her charities and her husband's being executed, vicariously, by individuals employed for that purpose. Life was always at the flood and she rode gayly on the first wavelet, preening herself in the bow of her splendid craft.

It is difficult to daunt the aspirations of such a person and she had now attained almost every ambition of her life. That this attainment had cost her something in the qualities which count as spiritual is not to be doubted, but what did those deficiencies matter to Alicia Mohun since she was unaware of them? And if there were people who said that her

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beauty was a little cold, her lips a little hard, she knew that she had only to smile at them to hitch her critics to her chariot wheel.

In the casual and impersonal way of the youth of the period her children adored her. She flattered them constantly and let them do exactly as they chose. She had perfect confidence in them—because she was sure that, basking in the constant sunshine of her own perfections, they could not possibly do anything discreditable. In the back of her head, of course, there was a hope that Cherry would make a brilliant match. Mrs. Mohun had succeeded in everything else, why not in this? And indeed her daughter, even before her début, was already surrounded by a gay set of wealthy young men, most of whom were distinctly eligible, from the worldly point of view, which of course was the only point of view that mattered.

If Cherry had formulated any ideas upon the subject she said nothing of them, but it was clear to those who knew her well that in the end she would probably do exactly as she pleased. Her mother knew that she swore, that she smoked, that her self-sufficiency as a driver of ambulances in Paris had made the thought of a chaperon a joke, and that she was accustomed to go whither she pleased by day or night with any companions she chose, either male or female. But Mrs. Mohun comforted herself with the assurance that these were but passing phases of social custom and that Cherry under any conditions was now quite able to look out for herself. And so Mrs. Mohun made no

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attempt to stem the tide of carelessness, of recklessness in the habits and customs of the younger set. She followed the example of other mothers above and below her in the social scale, who, rather than risk the popularity of their daughters, figuratively closed their eyes, turned their backs, and put their trust in God.

But Cherry went on her way blissfully unaware of these mental reservations on the part of her mother. "Muzzy," as she called her, was a good sort, and neither of them took very seriously the half-bantering suggestions as to the proper conduct of Cherry's social campaign.

There was not the slightest doubt as to its success. Everybody told her that she was lovely and quite all right in every other way. And Cherry believed what everybody said. She was a child of Nature.

If any one had told her that the conduct of the crowd of young people with whom she consorted tended to demoralize the tone of society, she would have replied with perfect candor and some resentment, that they were all as straight as strings and as fine a lot as anybody would find anywhere. And moreover, that, in so far as she personally was concerned, the "tone of society" could go to the devil. If Dad thought she was all right nothing and nobody else mattered. Perhaps if Dad had taken pains to inquire as to some of the escapades of her set, he might have undeceived her. But he didn't. He was too busy.

On the Sunday afternoon following the meeting at

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the Golf Club, Cherry was rather bored. The succession of social activities with which the past few weeks had been crowded had for some reason come to a pause—leaving her rather breathless and exhausted. Dick Wilberforce was away for the afternoon. Phoebe Macklin had gone motor boating with Jack Spencer and the rest of the crowd had made engagements. To make the matter worse, this was the day her mother chose for her afternoon at home, and, unless Cherry speedily found something to do, she was in for a trying afternoon in helping her mother entertain a lot of older people from the city, some artistic and literary celebrities, to the cultivation of whom she had lately been turning her talents. Having “arrived” with the people that really mattered, this harmless hobby diverted her. A little judicious patronage of the arts added tone to her “afternoons.” But Cherry did not share her enthusiasm. There would be an Italian bari-tone who would roar, a writer of pseudo-highbrow fiction who always talked about himself and a new painter of portraits who emulated Boldini. There would also be older people, neighbors in town and country, who affected a culture which they secretly despised.

To make matters worse, this was the very day upon which Dicky had promised to take her “up” in his new and very fast plane, with which he was going out for the latest race.

Cherry was disgruntled. Apparently there was nothing for it but a ride or a spin in the runabout, and both of these alternatives paled beside the gor-



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geous flight that she had missed. But she had almost decided on the horseback ride when her mother spoke.

"I had a note from George Lycett, darling. He's coming out this afternoon——"

"Really," said Cherry listlessly.

"And he's bringing his friend, Dr. David Sangree."

"Good Lord! That settles it. I'm off," said the girl, rising.

"But, my dear——" began Mrs. Mohun, calmly.

"*That* freak! Oh, Muzzy."

"What do you mean? Have you met this Dr. Sangree?"

She nodded. "At the Golf Club. I asked him, I don't know why—unless I thought he wouldn't come."

"But he *is* coming, my dear. And he's one of *the* Sangrees. I looked him up in the 'Social Register.' Quite all right. Very fine old family and some money. Distinguished too. Harvard Foundation Research man and one of the best known—ethnogra——"

"Ethnologists," said Cherry, as she remembered. "He looks the part, Muzzy dear—thin, with goggles." And then as an after thought—"He annoys me."

"In what way?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Cherry with a frown. "He squinted out of his glasses sideways as though I were a specimen and he talked like a book. I hate stodgy people. They make me furious. I want to shock them. I always feel like saying something indecent."

"I've no doubt you did, my dear."

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Cherry lighted a cigarette and shrugged the topic out of existence as her mother went on,

"But a Sangree! I do wish you'd stay. It *does* help me out such a lot. Besides, Cherry, you know, Mr. Lycett is in some of your father's companies and I think he'd want you to be polite."

"Oh, yes, of course." The girl who had paused on her way to the door now turned toward her mother.

"By the way, Muzzy," she asked, "what's the matter with Dad, lately?"

"I'm sure I don't know. What do you mean, Cherry?"

"Do you mean that you haven't noticed?"

"Noticed what?"

"How worried he looks."

Alicia Mohun shrugged.

"The abstraction of business, my dear. He has looked that way for twenty-five years. It costs some worry to be wealthy in New York."

"Yes, I understand," said Cherry quietly, "but I can't remember ever seeing him so gray and tired looking. I don't think any of us consider Dad enough, Muzzy."

"He doesn't give us a chance to consider him——"

"But would we consider him even if he gave us the chance?" she insisted. "He hasn't a very important part in your life or in mine. I feel sorry for Dad. He ought to take a day off now and then."

"When he does he's bored to death, my dear." Alicia Mohun's slender fingers wove daintily in and out among

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the flowers that she was rearranging. "You needn't waste your sympathy on your father. He would rather be in his office, with his fingers at the pulse of business, than doing anything else in the world. Business is a part of him. It's his lifeblood."

"Then all I've got to say is that it isn't nourishing him much," said Cherry. "Are you sure that everything is all right, Muzzy?"

"Of course, you foolish child. You don't know your father as I do. What put such a notion as that into your head?"

"Oh, nothing,—and if Dad doesn't complain, why should *we* worry? But sometimes I wonder if we're really as rich as we think we are."

"We have enough, Cherry. Of course, we should have more. Don't bother about that. Your father seldom speaks of his affairs to me, to any one. But I have a wonderful faith in him. I always have had. I believe in my Faith. I flatter myself that without it we shouldn't have come as far as we have."

"But what's the end of it all? Haven't we got all that we need? The only thing we haven't got is a yacht and you know you get frightfully seasick."

"But I do want the Wetherby's place at Newport, dear. The price is ridiculous. They're really giving it away."

"Muzzy, dear, I'm afraid you're spoiled. We've all of us got into the way of thinking that Dad can do wonders, like a magician taking a rabbit out of a hat. But it can't go on forever. Jack Spencer

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says there may be an awful slump in everything soon."

"Well, I'm glad we're well beyond being affected by that," said the pretty lady rounding out the discussion, confidently. "But I do wish you'd stay this afternoon, Cherry. Mr. Lycett is so fond of you."

"Do you really want me to, Muzzy?"

"There's a dear. You *can* be so agreeable when you like to be."

"Oh, all right," sighed Cherry. "I'll get into riding togs and go later. But do put a little 'hooch' on the tea table and 'sic' Lydia Brampton on to the ethnologist person. He gives me a pain."

"Cherry, you're incorrigible."

. . . . .

If one said that the actuating motive of David Sangree's visit to Oyster Bay was curiosity one would come somewhere near the truth. As George Lycett had said, some water had run under the bridge since he had been home, a statement which applied as correctly to David Sangree as it did to most of the people that he had known. But while Sangree had been sobered by the tragedies that he had witnessed during the War, some of his younger friends, it seemed, had taken the War as a kind of amusing adventure which they relinquished with regret. His own part in it had been too horrible an experience to be easily forgotten, for he had lived through three typhus epidemics and had seen more than his share of death and starvation. He was surprised at the signs of indifference

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which greeted him on every side. Even in England, when he reached there, the pendulum had already swung wildly and a frenzy of gayety was the order of the hour among the people that he knew. This was explained away as the beginning of a holiday, the breaking of the discipline of war, an interim of self-indulgence which would not last. But it had already lasted nearly two years and there was no sign of a swinging of the pendulum back to normal.

In the United States he found the same condition of affairs, if anything, slightly exaggerated, and permeating all classes of society. The essential materiality of the army philosophy had led to a diminution if not to a destruction of old ideals, to an unconcern for the value of human life and a taste for recklessness and crime, offered in evidence every day in the pages of the newspapers. The study of ancient civilizations had given him a historical perspective which he applied to the present situation for his own interest and amusement. Every way the repatriated traveler looked he saw signs of decadence which amazed him. To George Lycett, who acted for the present as his mentor and guide (as Lycett expressed it "like Virgil conducting Dante through the nethermost depths of the Infernal Regions"), it seemed that David Sangree was taking the manners and customs of the day too seriously. After all they merely reflected a passing phase in the national life. Sturdy optimist that he was, he believed that the innate good in the great majority of people must ultimately gain the ascendancy.

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But David Sangree wagged his head and blinked through his glasses. His reading had made him believe that luxury and vice were the legacy of victorious peoples. Of one thing he was certain, that his own people were living too fast—especially the young people who were burning up their spiritual potentialities in a mad pursuit of pleasure, in which their elders were not far behind them. At every hotel, every café, there were sounds of Jazz music and people hopping or whirling perpetually in antics which suggested the prancing of the Dervish or the sinuous motions of the Ouled Nail, the one of which is fanatic and the other sexual.

Particular instances of recklessness in members of the younger set had been indicated to him, and, though he had never been inclined to listen to gossip, the evidence was too definite to be lightly regarded. The habits of Miss Cherry Mohun, who had seemed to him a very splendid sort of a creature, were not beyond criticism, for Mrs. Lycett, who did not share the blithe optimism of her husband, made the definite statement that she smoked, drank, gambled, kept late hours, refused to submit to the conventions and was, in short, as careless of public opinion as a chipping sparrow.

And, without seeking it, David Sangree had stumbled upon evidence that at least a part of Mrs. Lycett's charges were true, for one night, returning to the Lycetts' from a motor trip to Port Jefferson, where he had consulted rather late with a fellow scientist, he had come upon a car in trouble upon the road. There

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was a broken fence and a damaged fender together with internal injuries to the machine too serious for immediate diagnosis. Sangree had succeeded in towing the damaged car and its occupants to a garage a few miles away, where the derelicts, a man and a girl, declining his further assistance, obtained another car and followed him toward town at two in the morning.

The girl of the joy-ride was Cherry Mohun, the man, one of the party Sangree had seen at the Golf Club, but as the darkness had made excusable her refusal to recognize him he made no attempt to remind her of their acquaintance. That her companion was very slightly drunk might have escaped his notice had not the causes of the accident provoked a justifiable curiosity. Of this chance meeting Sangree had said nothing to George Lycett, nor to any one else, but he had a feeling that by his silence Miss Cherry Mohun was being laid under a very definite obligation.

A stronger motive impelling his wish to meet the other members of the Mohun family was the knowledge, lately confided, that a considerable part of his private fortune, administered in his absence by George Lycett, had been invested in some of Jim Mohun's companies.

George Lycett, to whom had been entrusted the management of Sangree's business affairs during his absence in the East, was a firm believer in the star of James K. Mohun, and had invested most, if not all, of David Sangree's fortune with a great deal of his own, in the Mohun enterprises.

Perhaps the investments had not been quite con-

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servative, but they had been successful, and so the end justified the means. The talks that David Sangree had had with Jim Mohun since his return had been quite satisfactory and in a few months, it seemed, there would be enough of a return on his holdings to make him a very wealthy man—so rich indeed that he could afford to spend the remainder of his life in the cultivation of the scientific projects which were nearest his heart. The time to sell was not yet, he was told. Conditions were still a little uncertain. But the assurances of growing value in his shares gave Sangree a pleasant sense of financial security, and he had left the Mohun offices in a satisfactory state of mind which was shared by his optimistic adviser.

These pleasant business relations gave David Sangree a feeling of personal interest in the Mohun family, so that the visit which he and George Lycett were paying had a general as well as a purely social significance.

If the daughter had created a rather forbidding impression upon his staid consciousness, the mother was altogether charming. Her perfection bewildered him. And he wondered how such a charming creature could be the mother of the joy-riding hoyden. Alicia always affected strangers that way. If there were deficiencies in the Mohun family no one ever carried them to her door. She always created the illusion of being incapable of mistake. If her children were rather wild, the age and not their mother was responsible.

David Sangree talked with her for a while and then was passed on to Miss Lydia Brampton according to



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the prearrangement. Lydia belonged to the vast army of masterless women. During the War she had worn her Emergency Aid uniform so constantly that there were those who averred she slept in it at night. But now, her occupation gone, she was devoting her activities to the cultivation of all that she had missed in art, science and literature. To that end the visit of David Sangree was most opportune and she lost no time in acquainting herself with his experiences in the Near East. No one, perhaps, in all that assemblage could have drawn him out as Lydia Brampton did, for she was known as the human question mark when not indulging in the perpendicular pronoun. But she submerged herself in the interest in his narrative and, in the general conversation that followed, David Sangree found himself, quite unintentionally, the center of a group which listened as he talked. It was a sordid tale, uncolored, of plague, pestilence and famine, of battle, murder and sudden death, and, the crust of his reserve broken, Sangree warmed to his hobby which was that of attempting to save a Christian people from extermination. If he talked, as Cherry Mohun had said, "like a book," and if his manner had none of the flamboyant self-confidence to which she was accustomed, there was in his even tones a deep note of sincerity which seemed to hold his listeners without difficulty. According to the standards that Cherry had set, this ethnologist person compared unfavorably with almost every young man of her acquaintance, and yet she found herself pausing in her conversation with Mr. Ly-

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cett to listen to the dry insistence of his voice which, though unpleasant to the ear, carried with it a kind of mild authority which compelled her in spite of herself. She had made up her mind to snub him, but he hadn't given her the chance. And if she had thought it possible that he might in some way refer to their meeting on the road a few nights ago, she soon discovered that he meant her to understand that, so far as he was concerned, the incident had never taken place. More than that, he completely ignored her. She belonged, it seemed, in a sphere quite without the realms of his consciousness.

## CHAPTER III

### GILPIN'S RIDE

IT was seldom that Jim Mohun had found time to make an appearance at any of his wife's "at homes," especially since she had chosen to dedicate her Sunday afternoons to the patronage of the Arts, and he entered his own drawing-room upon these occasions with an air of furtiveness and unease. But to-day, spying George Lycett, he crossed to him at once, gave him a hearty handclasp and in the redistribution of groups which followed joined the newest visitor and made him welcome.

"Ah, Sangree," he said with a smile. "So glad you've looked us up. I've wanted very much to have you meet the family."

"Thanks," said Sangree. "It has been very pleasant."

"I don't get time to go in much for these highbrow affairs," he whispered. "Rather dull, between you and me—if you're bored, suppose we go out on the terrace. I'd like you to see the place too." He caught the younger man by the arm and led the way toward the nearest French window, by which Cherry Mohun now sat with the baritone who was promising her that his next song would be addressed to her violet-blue eyes.

"Oh, Cherry," broke in her father as he espied her,

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"you've met Dr. Sangree, stockholder in some of my companies. My daughter, Doctor. I want you to be good friends. Won't you take Sangree out and show him the place, Cherry? That is if Signor—Signor—"

"Martelli," said the Italian, bowing stiffly.

"If Signor Martelli will permit—"

It was awkwardly done at best and to Cherry seemed too pointed to be quite agreeable. That was the trouble with Dad, he always had to be offering people on the altar of business expediency. What affair was it of hers if goggle-eyes *was* mixed in some of her father's business ventures? And yet she was not too dull to be aware of her father's insistence. So she preceded them to the terrace, acquiescent but bored and a little angry at having let herself in for such an unpleasant afternoon. It was almost enough to have been cheated out of her flight in the airplane with Dicky without having this dry-as-dust philosopher thrust down her throat. Now, probably, she would miss her ride on "Bramble" into the bargain. But she felt intuitively that, no matter how boring, she must do as her father wished at least this once, for he *did* look tired and worried. It seemed so strange that neither her mother, nor her brother Bob had noticed it.

Outside, upon the terrace, Jim Mohun pointed out the beauties of the place, indicated with a wave of the hand the sunken garden now ablaze with his prize dahlias and chrysanthemums, the wide lawn now steeped

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in shadows with the view of the Sound through the bordering forests.

"Old place I picked up—only the buildings and gardens are new. You can't grow woods like those overnight."

"Handsome," muttered Sangree, his gaze on Cherry.

"Hard job during the War to keep enough people on the place to look after things, but we've managed somehow. Those are the stables over there—the garage beyond. Are you interested in horses? We have a few good ones. Cherry—my daughter—rides to the hounds—rides straight too, they tell me. Eh, my dear?" He patted her broadcloth shoulder affectionately. "Suppose you take Dr. Sangree out and show him around."

Having thus carefully destroyed his daughter's hopes of retrieving her lost afternoon, her father left her with the unwelcome guest on the terrace and on the plea of letters to write went upstairs to his own room.

Cherry stood in a moment of doubt beside the unfamiliar tweed-clad figure.

"I'm afraid," she heard him say, "that I'm taking you away from your friends."

"Oh, they're not my friends," she said with a shrug. "Come on, if you like," and moved down the steps of the terrace to the lawn, her lithe young figure in its riding coat, boots and breeches seeming very straight and rather scornful. Against his will Sangree followed her, obeying the injunction of his host. He was

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very uncomfortable, for he was sure that she did not mean to be polite. On each occasion when they had met she had given evidence of strong distaste for his society, in no case more marked than at the present. He wasn't sure that he did not share her feelings, and yet the enigma she presented still interested him. It was difficult to believe that any young female person with so flowerlike a face could be so lost to all sense of conventional morality as had been indicated to him. He joined her in a moment.

"You ride?" she asked indifferently.

"Oh, yes. I had to—a good deal—in the East. That was the only way to get about."

"Stupid—unless you're going across country. That's good fun, but it's not 'in it' with flying." And then, as though anticipating the disappointment in his reply, "Have you ever flown?"

"Yes. We had four planes."

"Oh, it's gorgeous, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, but it's very alarming."

"Alarming! You mean you're frightened?"

"Yes, always. Of course when it's necessary one does such things. But I can't see the slightest need of risking one's life when there's nothing to be gained by it."

"Oh!" she said with a shrug, as she compared him with the magnificent Dicky. "Of course if you're frightened——"

"I've never gone up without thinking I'd come down

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in a mess, and it went against the grain when you sent the other fellow down that way. It was beastly."

"You mean, you fought—that way?"

"Yes. We had a voluntary squadron against the Turks. They bothered us a great deal. But we managed to stop them."

She turned a glance of curiosity varying between dubiety and respect.

"Tell me more, please."

"No. I'd rather not," he finished quietly. "I've never found much pleasure in killing or in telling of it."

She gazed at him, round-eyed with amazement. The dry, matter-of-fact tones of his voice taxed her credulity. They differed so greatly from those of Dicky Wilberforce whose casual references to death and destruction filled her with an abiding admiration. And her loyalty to Dicky challenged the reticence of her present companion, whose appearance comported so little with his half-mentioned deeds of adventure. He was so little heroic. Her Argus glances saw only the goggles, the bent shoulders, and the shambling gait of this queer creature as he ambled on beside her. She wasn't quite certain that she believed him. A hero who was frightened! She laughed outright.

"Excuse me, Dr. Sangree," she said with a laugh, "but you don't seem of the stuff that 'aces' are made of."

"I'm not," he said with some dignity. "I wasn't

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an ace, or anything like it. You asked me if I'd flown. I merely answered your question."

His air of pique amused her. Perhaps after all her afternoon was not to be wasted. He was so stodgy and self-satisfied, and his dignity affronted her. She would have liked to stick a pin in him to see if he would really bleed.

"You're full of surprises, Dr. Sangree," she went on. "I didn't know ethnologists ever did anything so exciting."

He smiled and stared straight before him through his goggles. "The War has done some astonishing things to us all," he said.

She caught the significant note in his words, and imagined, if she did not feel, the reproach.

"Exactly what do you mean?" she asked, turning quickly.

"Just what I say. We've all done things we didn't think we *could* do. And the world is hardly the same place that it was six years ago."

"H—m," she muttered, ironically, "the world doesn't please you now, Dr. Sangree?"

"I don't see what difference it can make whether it pleases me or not."

"Oh, I know. Mr. Lycett told me," she said with warmth, "you belong to the crowd who think that the United States is going to the devil."

"No. The devil has saved some waste motion by coming to the United States," he said with a dry laugh.



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"In exactly what don't we please you?" she mocked. "You see, there are so many of us, and so few of *you*."

She might have been more impressive if she had been more polite. As it was she seemed like a spoiled child.

"Perhaps we had better change the subject——"

"I don't want to change the subject," she said quickly. "It's very amusing. You don't like the manners of the day. Why not, Dr. Sangree. Won't you answer me?"

As he was silent she went on in a half-bantering tone, "You like the age of ruffles and lavender, don't you—when women fainted at the sight of blood or went into hysterics when they couldn't have their own way. Lots of good women like that would have done in *this* War!" she finished contemptuously.

Sangree smiled faintly. Her petulance was rather surprising.

"Let me remind you," he said coolly, "that my own point of view need not concern you in the least."

"It does. I'm one of the good little people that the devil has come to. I smoke, Dr. Sangree; I drink; I play bridge for money; I spend my time where I please. I even drive late at night with reckless young men who smash machines against fences and have to be towed in, in disgrace, by perfectly respectable ethnologists who look with pity on the error of my ways——"

He stopped abruptly and stared at her in dismay at her impudence.

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"Miss Mohun, I beg of you——"

"No, you see, I owe you that," she said, shrugging lightly. "Of course you can think what you please—that I'm gay, loose, unprincipled——"

"Miss Mohun!"

"I may be all of those things. Perhaps I am. But what I say is—what the devil are you going to do about it?"

"Good God!" he stammered, aghast and befuddled. "What *can* I do about it!"

The words came from him with artless spontaneity and his round eyes through the goggles seemed twice their size. There was no doubt now of the genuineness of his interest or the ingenuousness of his point of view. He believed her all that she had said she was. Cherry Mohun threw back her head and laughed softly. She couldn't remember when she had been so greatly entertained.

"I ought to be very grateful for your interest," she said in mock humility, "because it really seems quite sincere. But I'm afraid there's no hope of your doing anything to help me. I'm a lost soul, you know."

"Oh, I say——"

"Oh, yes, I am. Quite lost. I don't feel that I'm fit company for any respectable ethnologist. You see, Dad 'wished me' on you. He thinks I'm all right. He doesn't imagine all the terrible things that I've confessed to you. But I do hope you can put up with me—at least until we see the stables."

David Sangree refused to smile. He had no mind to

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be made ridiculous by this astonishing young worldling. And yet he was quite sure that she had made him so, and he only blundered the more.

"I'm quite sure that you—er—have a right to form—er—any habits that you please. Our chance encounter—at night—has given me—er—no license either to comment or to criticize. I would remind you that I have not done so——"

"Oh, I'm so much obliged to you. But you don't really approve of me, Dr. Sangree. *Please* admit that."

"I'm afraid you want people to think you're much worse than you are," he said coolly.

"Really. Do you think that? That's rather nice of you, Dr. Sangree. But it isn't true. I'm an awful creature. I'm actually so depraved that I don't give a damn what people think of me."

Sangree grinned. "You at least have the convictions of your courage," he said.

They had reached the stable inclosure and she swaggered in ahead of him. In her mannish clothing she looked like an overgrown boy, but her impudent irony informed him that she was quite too clever at the game of verbal give-and-take for anything that he had to offer. He was stirred by the thought that, more than anything else, what Miss Cherry Mohun needed was a sound spanking.

If she was aware of this mental castigation she gave no sign of being so. She was quite certain that,

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in the game she had been playing, the professorial antiquity that Dad had "wished on her" had come out second-best. But the end of her afternoon's enjoyment was not yet. In the back of her head a joyous plan was forming, a delicious plan which still further involved the disillusionment of Dr. David Sangree. It was Dad's fault. His was the responsibility whatever happened now.

The heads of horses protruded from the upper halves of the doors of several box stalls. Cherry Mohun exhibited with pride her own hunter, "Bramble," and her brother Bob's mare, "Centipede." They were very restless, snorting and twisting about in their narrow confines.

"It seems as though they needed exercise," commented Sangree.

"Oh, yes. I haven't ridden for a week. Poor old Bramble! You know he won a blue in the Challenge Class at Piping Rock. Isn't he too adorable!"

"Yes, too adorable," said Sangree soberly, as though really aware of the fate that awaited him.

"You say you ride, Dr. Sangree?" she asked, turning to him suddenly.

"A little," replied Sangree with a nod.

She laughed. "You know," she said, "I'm simply perishing for a ride."

"Please don't let me interfere with your plans," he said, hastily.

"But you have already interfered with them," she

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went on coolly. "Mother wanted me to meet you and I stayed. I'm awfully obedient when I have to be. But you see I *have* met you now——"

"Don't bother about me. I'll find my way back."

"Oh, no. That wouldn't do. But I'm sure Mother wouldn't mind my going in the least if you'll only go with me."

"Me——!"

"Why not? Riding alone is beastly and I never take a groom. Please, Dr. Sangree, won't you ride with me?"

She had faced him and her blue eyes were as innocent of guile as those of a cat which has just swallowed the canary.

"Please, Dr. Sangree," she insisted. "Bramble and Centipede have been eating their heads off for a week. It will be awfully jolly, and the country is simply gorgeous this afternoon."

"If you'll excuse me, I think——"

"You're going to refuse? Oh, Dr. Sangree!"

"I haven't ridden for a year. I ride very badly," he said stiffly.

"I'm sure you're too modest."

"No," he replied coolly. "But I have no desire to be thrown off."

She turned half away from him, biting her lip.

"I thought that you'd ridden in the East." She shrugged a shoulder. "I'm beginning to believe that you were never in the East, that you've never ridden a horse or even seen an airplane." She turned again

## GILPIN'S RIDE

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toward him, smiling to take the sting from the inference. "I'm sure you ought to be flattered by my asking you."

"I am. But I have no wish to make myself ridiculous."

"You refuse then?" she said with another shrug, this time a trifle contemptuous. "Are you really frightened, Dr. Sangree?"

David Sangree straightened and stared at her for a moment through his goggles. Then his brows drew together.

"Frightened! Well—er—perhaps—a little. But I'll ride with you, if you insist, Miss Mohun."

"I don't insist," she said demurely. "But I couldn't believe after all I've heard that you were really afraid."

"I am afraid of mettlesome horses. But I'll ride with you."

Their glances flashed together for the briefest moment and Cherry laughed gayly at the sudden resolve that she had found in him, which was at once a tribute to her finesse and her power.

"Oh, thanks," she said with a gay laugh. "Of course I knew that you weren't really frightened."

Sangree didn't reply and merely stood awkwardly, his fingers twiddling at the seams of his trousers, while the stableman put the saddles on the horses. This seemed rather a difficult task, productive of unpleasant and sinister motions from the mare, Centipede, which was to be, as he now understood, the animal allotted to him. From time to time he saw the eye of

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the stableboy glance askance in his direction, but Miss Cherry Mohun, occupied with the too adorable Bramble, already seemed to have forgotten him.

"The mare is pretty fresh, Miss," he heard the groom say. "If the gentleman——"

"It's all right, Peter," she laughed. "But you needn't say anything to Mr. Robert. Just give me a hand up, will you?"

She was in the saddle with boyish ease, Bramble prancing and curvetting gracefully around the stableyard, while Centipede, awake to the opportunities of the open spaces, struggled with the active stableboy, who held her head down and led her to the unwilling victim.

But David Sangree was "game." If Cherry had counted on ridicule to achieve her pleasure the ruse had been entirely successful. He mounted and got his feet into the stirrups, when the boy released the horse's head. Cherry, on Bramble, an amused twinkle in her eyes, was already headed for the gate which Peter had run to open for her, when Centipede, one of whose ancestors some generations back had been bred on the western range, began weaving intricate posterior circles, ending in a series of playful buckjumps in the general direction of the outer wall. The first of these buckjumps lost Sangree his right stirrup, the second one his left and the third sent him flying over Centipede's head, so that he fell rather heavily on one arm and shoulder and lay for a moment motionless.

Peter the groom and the stableboy came running.

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The boy caught the horse and Peter bent over the victim who had now struggled to a sitting posture and was looking about him in a bewildered way. His face had gone very white but he got to his feet watching the stableboy capture the refractory horse. This accomplished, he was aware of Cherry Mohun's voice somewhere in the air above him—

"You're not badly hurt, Dr. Sangree?" she asked.

"No—no. Not at all," he replied. "It—er—all happened rather—er—suddenly."

Glancing up, he caught a glimpse of the smile that hovered at the corners of her lips and heard what seemed like a sort of low gurgle in the tones which she guiltily tried to make sympathetic. She was laughing at him, openly, brazenly.

"I don't think he'd better be ridin' the mare, Miss——"

"Bring her here," Sangree's rasping voice cut in. His face was whiter than ever, and Peter glanced at Miss Mohun.

"Give me a hand up, please."

"Do you think you'd better?"

"Yes. Yes. I'll stick on now."

He got into the saddle somehow, but his right arm hung awkwardly.

"Just use the snaffle unless she gets to pulling, sir," said Peter dubiously.

"I don't intend that she shall get away from me," said David Sangree as they went out of the gate into the road, but whether he referred to Centipede or to



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Miss Mohun, no one will ever know, for at that moment Bramble shook his head and away they went with a sudden noisy clatter and a rattle of pebbles against the fence rails. After the first sprint Cherry Mohun looked over her shoulder. The "professorial antiquity" was still upright not far behind her and his face wore a rather ghastly smile.

Now somewhat reassured as to his horsemanship, she let Bramble have his head for a few hundred yards, rejoicing in the swift rush of keen air, the joy of motion, and the predicament of her companion.

Perhaps some admiration for his pluck in mounting after his fall had caused her to keep Bramble in check for the first few minutes. But she couldn't forget that he had dared to believe the very worst of her and to let her see that he believed it. Goggle-eyes! She smiled exultantly over her shoulder. He was still in the saddle, close at Bramble's heels. His gaze was straight before him along the road and he was riding with a loose rein which speedily sent Centipede into the lead. Fool! He meant to race. She let Bramble have his head and she led the way.

Both horses were breathing hard now, for the road had a slight upgrade. But at the top of the hill where prudence compelled her to pull in, he passed her in full stride, down a slight declivity, swaying back in his saddle but, by some miracle, keeping his seat.

She followed, rather alarmed at his desperateness, for a fall here at this speed meant dangerous injury.

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At the top of the next rise she caught him at the cross-roads, both horses breathing heavily.

"Are you trying to kill yourself?" she shouted.

He merely shook his head, and took a new grip of the reins.

"Which way?" he gasped.

"Home—if you're bent on committing suicide."

"Lead on!" he muttered with a gesture of his head.

"But you let her get away from you——"

"Did I? Well—er—" he grinned pallidly. "I'm still here."

"I don't want to see you kill yourself."

"Don't you. I thought you did."

"You needn't be an idiot. Let's go back."

"No." Without waiting for her reply he dug his heels into the heaving flanks of his horse and she followed. How he remained upright with such a seat was a mystery, for he swayed dangerously in his saddle and she noticed for the first time that his right arm hung motionless at his side.

Fool! He had been hurt too.

For the first time her conscience assailed her. No doubt his was a valuable life to somebody, and she was sure that she didn't want the responsibility of accounting for what now seemed to her the maddest of ventures. If she had doubted his stories or his pluck she was sure now that she had made a mistake in judgment. The only thing now was to overtake the fleet Centipede, and persuade this mad ethnologist to keep his

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horse in hand. She was even prepared to humble herself a little to gain her ends when they came again on even terms, but this, it seemed, was going to be a difficult thing to do, for at the top of the next hill where the road took a sharp turn to the right, with dismay, she saw Centipede go straight on, over three rails into a meadow. There was clear daylight between horse and rider but somehow he stayed on and in a moment Bramble followed neatly, racing toward the already distant figures on the hill.

Apparently Centipede's rider was making no effort to check her speed. He reached another fence, cleared it and was already over the brow of the hill when Bramble followed. The pace was furious. There seemed not the slightest doubt that Centipede was running away. Cherry was now very much worried. Her little joke had gotten out of hand—like Centipede—and she was thoroughly angry at herself and angrier at Sangree for taking so dangerous a way of turning the tables on her.

As Bramble thundered on she couldn't help thinking of John Gilpin and his ride, for this mad philosopher and his horse, it seemed, were now beyond catching before calamity came. But the spirit of the chase was in her blood and in Bramble's and they gained a little at the next field. There was a ditch which Centipede cleared, then a road with two jumps—an in and out—fortunately both low, and Cherry breathed a sigh of relief when her companion cleared them and went on down the meadow beyond.

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Centipede was tiring now, for her tail was up and her head was down and she was cantering wearily by the time she reached an open gate which led to the turnpike beyond, where the sun glinted on the polished surfaces of rapidly moving automobiles. That Sangree must have been aware of this danger was now apparent for he pulled his tired horse down and when Bramble galloped up he was waiting. There was no more fight left in Centipede, and the sweat was pouring from her heaving flanks.

The man on the horse was pale and disheveled and the lower parts of his trousers had worked up toward his knees. She noticed that he wore blue garters. But he still wore his pallid smile.

"Which way now?" he asked in a quiet tone.

"No—nowhere!" she gasped. "Home. You've given me a terrible fright."

"Did I?"

"Yes. Are you a fool or a madman? Why didn't you stop when I shouted to you?" she asked angrily.

"You should have shouted at the horse."

"Oh, I've no patience with you. Come!"

She turned Bramble toward the break in the fence and they went out into the turnpike, the heads of the winded horses toward home. It was not until then that she noticed his right arm again and remembered his fall.

"I—I'm afraid you're hurt," she said anxiously.

"Oh, it's of no consequence," he muttered and was silent.

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He seemed quite unaware of his disordered appearance, quite unaware even of her, his gaze on the road before him, his brows set and his jaws clamped tightly as she had seen them when he had mounted.

When they left the turnpike a half mile farther on she spoke again.

"I'm afraid you're badly hurt. I'm fearfully sorry."

"Ah, are you? Thanks."

"Yes, I am, Dr. Sangree. Sorry for everything. Have you ever jumped before?"

"No. But the horse had," he said with a grin.

"It was wonderful how you stuck."

"Yes, it was, wasn't it? I think—er—that is—I knew I'd have been killed if I hadn't."

She waited a moment and then, "Why did you do it, Dr. Sangree?" she asked.

He smiled painfully but made no reply.

"Won't you answer me."

"No."

"Is your arm hurting much?"

"A little."

"You're terribly plucky. Please forgive me, won't you?"

"There's nothing to forgive."

"But you will, won't you? I was a little beast."

He smiled at her and looked before him, his face twisted with pain, but he made no reply.

"Please forgive me."

"Of course."

She saw that he was suffering, that he only remained

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upright by sheer effort of will and she rode beside him now watching him anxiously. It seemed hours before they rode down the hill and into the gate of the stable-yard, where the dubious Peter was awaiting them. The stableboy took Centipede's head and Sangree slid from the saddle, stood upright a moment and then quietly crumpled into a heap on the ground.

## CHAPTER IV

### "JAZZ"

"**B**UT, my dear," asked Alicia Mohun of her daughter, "how on earth could you have permitted him to ride, knowing that his arm was broken."

"I *didn't* know it," muttered Cherry sullenly. "He insisted on going."

"That was extremely foolish. The man must be mad."

"Oh, don't blame *him*. It wasn't *his* fault." Cherry broke off impetuously and walked to the door of the adjoining room where she stood listening. "I suppose it hurts awfully." And then, "I'm a fearful little beast, Muzzy."

"Why, my dear?"

"Oh, I thought he was just a quitter. I wanted to show him up. I laughed at him."

"Cherry!"

"Yes, I did. He annoyed me. But I didn't know his arm was broken. I swear I didn't."

"Really, my dear, I can't see why you should have taken such a prejudice against this——"

"Oh, let up, Muzzy, will you! I feel badly enough as it is. Do you think they'll be long? I wish it had been my arm now, I really do."

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"Your pretty arm! God forbid! Your season would have been ruined."

The door of the adjoining room opened and Mr. Mohun entered.

"How is he getting on, Dad?" asked Cherry quickly.

"Oh, he's coming around all right. They've set the bone and put the arm in plaster. Lycett is going to take him home."

"Hadn't he better stay here? Isn't it the least we can do?"

"He insists on going."

"Oh," said Cherry with a grin, "if he insists on going, he'll go—all right. That man! Don't tell me that I know anything about human nature any more. Who would have thought he'd turn the tables on me like that?"

She sank into an armchair disgusted with herself and all the world. "But I would like to see him for a second before he goes. Could I, Dad?"

"I think not," said Mohun decisively. "Fetherston says he'd better not see anybody."

"Oh."

Cherry found her cigarette case and in a fit of abstraction lighted one, gazing out of the window.

"How was I to know his arm was broken?" she asked rapidly of no one in particular. "Why didn't he say something about it instead of getting on again? Say, Dad, that man rides like a drunken sailor—clear daylight under him all the time—but he beat me to it—on Centipede too—something Bob never did. My



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hat's off to this ethnologist bunch. If there are any more like him, Dad, just you keep 'em away from here, will you?"

Mohun laughed while his wife gently chided.

"Please—not so slangy, Cherry dear. And now hadn't you better go and change for dinner?"

Cherry sighed, flicked her cigarette, scarcely lighted, into the fire and went silently out.

Jim Mohun paced the floor heavily for a moment. "Doesn't it seem to you, my dear Alicia," he muttered, "that Cherry is going it a bit strong?"

His wife halted at the door. "Exactly what do you mean? Surely it's not her fault if Dr. Sangree chooses to risk his neck for a whim of hers."

"No. That's his affair. I mean Cherry herself. I haven't seen much of the child of late—and that's my fault, I suppose. But don't you think—er—that she ought to be steadying down a bit? She's not a kid any longer. If she's ever going to grow up, isn't it about time she got more serious—? A little more dignity—"

"Oh, Jim, don't blame me. She's got to be like other girls—"

"But *has* she."

Mrs. Mohun came slowly back into the room her large eyes softly reproachful.

"Why, Jim! I'm surprised at you. You've always thought Cherry perfect. She has her faults of course. But then they're only very human ones. You know, as well as I do, that she's just full of animal spirits.

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"That's why she's so popular. Why, there isn't a girl in all Cherry's set that has half the attention that she has."

Jim Mohun dropped into a chair with a sigh.

"Oh, of course, I suppose so. That's what matters most when a girl is looking for a husband. But sometimes I find myself wondering whether we haven't given her too free a hand. She does exactly as she pleases—"

"But if what she pleases is perfectly all right, I don't see what difference it makes." She turned toward the door again. "Please don't bother me, Jim. I don't like your attitude, or the manner in which you express it. I don't think it's quite fair to me. And so long as *I* am satisfied—" She shrugged her pretty shoulders at the door.

"Oh, all right, my dear," muttered the husband. "All right. I've never doubted your wisdom. It's only Cherry's—"

"I think it would be better if the social destinies of this family were left in my hands," she finished and went out of the room.

That was Alicia Mohun's way of rounding out a discussion with her husband. She never raised her voice, never lost her self-control and, when her actions or her methods were questioned, she always went out at the door. Hers was the last word and it was usually final. But after she went out Jim Mohun sat for a while looking into the fire, a frown at his brows, a question in his eyes. It had come to him suddenly that Cherry was almost a stranger to him. Until

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to-day, he remembered with a twinge of regret, that he had hardly seen her for almost a month. Of course she was all right. How could he question her? And yet some of the tales that had come to him of the extravagances of the younger crowd had made him thoughtful. And Bob, the young rascal, what was he doing with all the money he got? Bad business not keeping in closer touch with the kids. If only he could get more time away from business. . . . He would have liked to stay at home to-night if it weren't for a conference. The tangle at his brows deepened and he rose only when a call from the adjoining room advised him that the injured man was about to be removed.

Meanwhile the object of this parental solicitude had reached her own room and, stretched in a chair, now permitted her maid to remove her boots and the other habiliments of her late encounter. Like her father's, her brows were tangled in thought and in her eyes was a question. Father and daughter were singularly alike but, at this moment, the daughter had a definiteness that the father lacked.

She had at last decided that she had had every incentive to anger at the performance of the ethnologist person, who, though he had made himself ridiculous, had succeeded in making her a trifle ridiculous also. The story of how this soft-spoken maniac had led her across country on Bob's horse, and beaten the famous Bramble by a field and a half, would be told with variations all over the hunting field—that is, unless

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it could be kept quiet. She would have to reckon with Bob too for risking Centipede's legs and wind in the surprising adventure. But angry as she was at mistaking the mildness of the visitor's manner for timidity, she couldn't help feeling sorry about the broken arm. That ride had taken "sand" and, to Cherry, "sand" in a man was more to be chosen than great riches or any personal qualities that he could possess, for the talk of deeds of valor had been in the very air that she had breathed. But to find courage of rather a superior order in the queer shambling creature, who spoke of glory with an abject air, and professed without shame to a terror of death or injury, was rather too much for her sense of the fitness of things, and, if somewhat flattering to her *amour propre*, the whole affair had been outlandish to the last degree. How on earth he could have stayed on was a miracle, but the scarecrow figure that he had made seemed less amusing now in the light of his accomplishment. She found that she had an unpleasant sense of having caught a Tartar.

She dressed slowly and then with a rush at the end of her toilet went down to greet her guests who were already arriving. Dinner at the Mohun houses had none of the aspects of formality, for Alicia Mohun had discovered that the easiest way to lose desirable acquaintances was to give tedious dinners, and that the path to their hearts lay through their desire not to be bored by unnecessary stodginess. The customs of an older day were passing and people pre-

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ferred to go where they would be most amused and best fed.

To Alicia Mohun, as indeed to most of the matrons of her set, Sunday was merely a day for social specialization. Hence the afternoon "at home" for the encouragement of laudable artistic ambitions. Surely God was with her in this. And where was the harm in having people in to dinner, providing one forswore "auction"? All the "smart" people had adopted the European Sunday, for, the Stock Exchange being closed for the entire day, this was the only opportunity of the week for the men of the community to take part in daylight affairs.

The dinner for which Cherry dressed was the first of a series to be given to groups of débutantes who were to be her associates in the coming winter campaign. And the merry crowd which filled the large drawing-room gave every evidence of sharing Cherry's liveliest propensities. The friendships of most of them had been inherited from school and college days and they all called one another by their Christian names.

Cherry, meanwhile, was engaged in spirited conversation with Dicky Wilberforce who was telling her about the new Verville racing plane, and, in her interest in her forthcoming flight, was completely oblivious of her surroundings. But a reckoning with her brother Bob, who sat in his father's place at the head of the table, awaited her, and it came with a suddenness which surprised her. For Eugenia Armitage, the mischievous, having vainly attempted to attract her at-

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tention by calling her name across the table, at last succeeded by the simple and effective expedient of throwing a piece of biscuit which struck Cherry's bare shoulder.

"Cherry!" she cried gleefully, "you *shall* notice me."

"Oh, 'Genie, do behave," laughed Cherry. "Can't you see that there are gentlemen present?"

"Where?" asked the other coolly. And then—"For the love of Mike, Cherry, do tell me who was that freak on the gray horse you were riding with this afternoon."

"Sh—!" said Cherry with a warning glance. "Nobody," and turned again to her companion.

"But I *insist*. He wore white socks, his garters were blue and he seemed very drunk."

"Please, 'Genie—"

"No. I'm resolved. Was it a race? And if so, why? I saw him cut in from the wood-road to the field with you after him. Why should you be chasing a drunken man in white socks and blue garters? And what did you do with him when you caught him?"

"It was just a—a—friend of—of mother's," said Cherry with some dignity. "He hadn't brought any riding clothes."

Cherry was aware that an interested silence had fallen upon the table. She was also aware of her brother's questioning glance.

"How exciting—" came Violet Everard's thin timid voice. "Do tell us, Cherry darling."

"There's nothing to tell. You're odious, 'Genie!"

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"Oh, you *might*, Cherry."

"I won't. Do shut up, 'Genie."

"Oh, I say, Cherry," her brother Bob put in, "a gray horse—you can't mean that you had him up on Centipede?"

Cherry nodded frigidly. "She needed exercise," she said. "I mean Centipede. It didn't hurt her. Dr. Sangree rides—er—very well." And then with an instinct to escape her dilemma, "And say, Bob, she led Bramble all the way—"

"Oh, I say, Muzzy," appealed Bob to his mother.

"It was quite all right, Bobby dear," came in Alicia Mohun's silken tones. "Cherry had *my* permission."

This oil on the waters pacified Bob for the moment who only questioned, "Who's Sangree?"

"A friend of your father's—a distinguished ethnologist."

"Ethnologist! But can he *ride*?"

"Ride!" broke in 'Genie again, "you should have seen him! He was the Wild West and the Cossacks all rolled into one."

"H—m," muttered the son of the house, deciding to pursue the matter further at a later moment.

"What's an ethnologist?" asked Gloria Towne, the convent-bred, innocently. "Oh, I know, *bugs*."

"Yes. That's it—Bugs!" finished Cherry furiously amid the laugh that followed, and turned to Dicky to conceal her chagrin.

Mrs. Mohun's guest of honor listened to this by-play in the odd moments of trifling with his *entrée*.

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"Sangree," he mused in a moment, "that can't be David Sangree—queer chap—with glasses. Went in for history or something—"

"Ethnology," said Alicia triumphantly. "He's very nice. A friend of Mr. Mohun's—in some of his business affairs."

"I see. I thought he seemed hardly the sort Miss Mohun would take to."

"Oh, Cherry's very catholic in her friendships, Mr. Chichester. I've tried to bring her up to see the good in everybody—that is," she added cautiously, "in everybody really worth while."

"Ah! She reflects great credit on your intelligence, Mrs. Mohun," said Chichester gallantly.

Mrs. Mohun's dinner partner was no less a person than Mr. John Chichester of the old and very wealthy family of that name, and she was now taking pains to have Cherry thrown into his company as often as possible, much to Cherry's discomfiture, for he was almost forty-five and assumed a spontaneity which his years and experience denied. It mattered nothing to Cherry that John Chichester was *the* Chichester of the present generation, that his fortune was fabulous, that he had been the "catch" of ambitious mothers for twenty years, that to all appearances he had at last decided to "settle down" and that Cherry Mohun was the object of his matrimonial intentions. She only saw in him a slender, sallow, fidgety person with stiff black hair, a thin wisp of mustache waxed carefully at the ends, a manner of being perpetually on



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his guard, and a reputation for various kinds of dissipation over which the Recording Angel must have worked overtime. He had inherited from John Chichester the elder a taste for old brandy and Cherry had never been able to forget the ancient story which George Lycett had once told her of how, at John Chichester's birth, the elder John Chichester's club mates had promptly named the boy "Demi-John."

The name had stuck in Cherry's mind. She didn't dislike John Chichester, because she didn't care enough about him to dislike him, and was as polite as it was necessary to be to one who threatened her with lavish social attentions and showed her an open admiration which was highly flattering to her self-esteem. But, secretly, he bored her a great deal and her mother's efforts to impress upon her the obvious advantages of his friendship did nothing to stimulate her interest or her social ambitions, which were at present a negligible quantity. What Cherry wanted just now was to follow her instincts as other young people were doing, somewhat blindly if you please, and leading she knew not and cared not whither so long as she had a good time.

If it is true that one is known by the company one keeps, these intimates of Cherry's among the girls were a fairly accurate index of her character. She liked Phoebe Macklin, because, when not enjoying pen-sive moments, she was joyous and shared Cherry's contempt of the conventions; Gloria, because she was the most insatiable of "jazzers"; Violet, because she was

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a very pretty thing and very nicely brought up; Eugenia—well—she liked 'Genie because she was mischievous and a trifle—just a trifle—naughty—and because both her parents had married again and she had been left under the gaudy wing of a giddy and unresponsive aunt. But which of them she liked the most Cherry herself could not have told, because she liked them all in different ways.

It was Gloria who began kicking the rugs of the drawing-room aside after dinner when Harold Galbraith, the musical clown of the group, began "jazzing" at the piano, a signal which the others were not slow to follow. Mrs. Mohun's mild protest, "Cherry, it's Sunday. Don't you really think—" was swept aside in the rush of enthusiasm and in a moment the polished floor was quivering to the lilt of dancing feet. Mrs. Mohun sank into the divan, pushed ruthlessly into a corner, and sighed with resignation to the inevitable.

"Oh, what's the harm, Muzzy?" said Cherry, swinging off under her very nose with Dicky Wilberforce. But in a moment she came back and held inviting arms toward John Chichester, offering this favor as a sop to her mother's ambitions. The irrepressible Harold played furiously for a while and then with an air of mock exhaustion fell backward from the piano stool to the floor amid much handclapping. Eugenie took his place—then Cherry hers, until at last, red of face and breathing heavily, the dancers fell rather than sank into chairs—all except Gloria Towne who remained in the center of the floor, giving an imitation

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of a "jazz" artist she'd seen in a cabaret somewhere.

"Oh say, that's a whiz," gasped the breathless Harold. And then amid laughter, "where'd you get that stuff, Gloria? In the convent?"

Gloria stopped, glanced reprovingly at the speaker and then with a frown sank into the nearest armchair.

"Lizard! You're a pinhead, Harold," she sniffed.

"All my brains are in my fingers. I am a 'jazz' though, aren't I, adored one? You know you can't make your feet behave—"

"Oh, run away and play, little boy. I'm tired."

"That's just the way with you débutantes," he said. "Hang around a fellow's neck in the holidays or at the 'proms' at college and then, when you come out, you get all stiff and starchy—"

"Oh, say, Harold, if you're going to cry, just go out on the porch, will you?" laughed Teddy Waring.

"But this woman has broken my heart—"

"I'll break your head if you don't shut up."

"Oh, all right—all right. I'm just a worm until you want me to play the piano. Well, I'm through."

With much dignity he sank into the seat beside Cherry. "Cherry, you'll be nice to me, won't you?"

"Don't, Cherry," put in Phoebe. "He's already spoiled within an inch of his life just because he's a piano player. You might think just because he could play 'jazz' that he was the Prince of Wales."

"*Et tu, Brute?* Oh, all right. I guess I'll roll the bones." And taking a set of dice from his pocket he began a game of solitaire in the corner.

## *"JAZZ"*

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The temporary lull provided an opportunity for the renewal of brother Bob's quarrel with Cherry.

"Rotten shame, I say, the way you use my things. I don't care what Muzzy says. I didn't mind your swiping my cravats or even my riding breeches, but you might at least have asked me for Centipede."

"I didn't know where you were, Bob. Please don't say anything more about it."

"I will. It's an outrage. A man doesn't know what belongs to him in this house. If Centipede's stove in front, you'll have to give me Bramble."

"Oh, all right, Bob." And then, with a cutting sarcasm, "But you ought to be glad to know there's somebody who can put Centipede over the jumps in front of Bramble."

"Oh, is that so? Think you're smart, don't you? Anybody can win on a runaway—"

"Who told you that?"

"'Genie.'"

"Well, 'Genie is mistaken."

"Oh, no, I'm not," Miss Armitage rejoined, as she caught her name. And then tantalizingly—"Please tell us what happened to the bug-man when you caught him."

"Oh, 'Genie, you go to the devil," said Cherry amiably.

"All in good time, darling. Just now, I've made up my mind to cut you out with your ancient admirer, if Harold will only play?"

The music began again and they danced themselves

## *THE HOUSE OF MOHUN*

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into a state of exhaustion, when Jack Spencer suggested that they all adjourn to the Country Club where one of the younger married crowd was giving a dinner. The mere thought of a change of scene was enough and they hailed it jubilantly, scurrying at once for wraps and machines. "Good night, Mrs. Mohun. Awf'ly jolly time." And in a moment Alicia Mohun stood alone in her dismantled drawing-room, frowning at her image in the mirror over the mantel.

How wonderful it would be if one could be young and care-free, like these children, forever!

## CHAPTER V

### SANGREE BECOMES A "WHIZ"

**D**R. SANGREE found some difficulty in explaining the definite impulses which had sent him upon his wild ride with Miss Cherry Mohun. That he now felt himself a good deal of a fool was certain, for it had never been his habit to put himself in jeopardy unless in the cause of those things which were requisite to the advancement of science or to the amelioration of the troubles of the human race. And how accepting the challenge of this wild young Amazon and risking not only his limbs but his life to gratify her humors could be placed in either of those categories, it was beyond his province to determine. But this startling reminder of his idiocy was constantly with him in the shape of an awkward, heavy bundle of plaster on his forearm, and a badly bruised hip, which were to confine him to the Lycetts' house for a week and make the writing of letters a difficulty and the work on his book impossible.

The visit to the Lycetts' had already been too long protracted, as his small apartment in town now awaited him, but the weather remaining fine and the golf course being nearby he had been persuaded by his hostess to extend his visit. His injury gave Mrs. Lycett the excuse she needed to keep him at Huntington until he was able to move about without discomfort.

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And as Mrs. Lycett was a very busy woman and the use of his right hand was prohibited, he had many idle hours in which to sit in the morning room and browse over his manuscript or meditate upon his folly. Even if this girl Cherry Mohun *had* challenged his physical courage, what possible difference should it have made? Physical courage was, after all, merely a trait of character more often than not given to persons of a very low order of intelligence—the acrobatic performer, the prize fighter, the fireman, the policeman or even the burglar. It was frequently held in high esteem and was doubtless commendable in the service of one's country, the preservation of order or in the saving of life or limb, but when none of those objects was in view, as in the instance which had resulted so disastrously for himself, he could only feel that he had done a very stupid and unnecessary thing at the whim of a silly girl to whom and to whose friends he was now affording considerable amusement. He wasn't particularly angry at Cherry Mohun—only impatient at the flaw in his will which had made him sensitive, for the moment, to her ridicule. It was this which kept him silent as to the actual details of the experience.

But on the third day of his confinement to the house he received a note from Miss Cherry Mohun, written in an angular scrawl, offering condolences and sending him some roses. This note pleased him, he couldn't say why—because it had evidently been very hurriedly written and was very badly expressed—unless perhaps

## *SANGREE BECOMES A "WHIZ"*

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because she had thought it necessary to write to him at all. But the roses were really very lovely, filling the room with fragrance all the afternoon. And the next day much to his surprise while he was sunning himself on the terrace, she drove up with a great noise of back-firing and stopped at the front door, springing out with an air of knowing exactly what she was about and approaching him directly.

"Hello!" she said cheerfully as he rose to greet her. "Don't get up. How's your arm?"

"All right. Thank you very much for the flowers. I tried to get you on the 'phone but you weren't in. I can't write, you know," he explained, moving a futile elbow.

"I'm so sorry. Indeed I am."

"Won't you sit down?" he asked awkwardly. "Mrs. Lycett has gone to town but—"

"Oh, that's fine. Then we can have a chat without being disturbed."

Sangree smiled at her downrightness, rather flattered just the same.

"I trust the—er—ah—Centipede suffered no ill effects from the experience," he ventured.

"No, she didn't," said Cherry, "but as a matter of fact I had the devil's own time squaring the thing with Bob. She's Bob's—my brother's—you know. He was mad as hops."

"Oh, was he? I'm sorry."

"Oh, I'm not. Bob is terribly spoiled. It served him right. He's always having his own way in every-



## THE HOUSE OF MOHUN

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thing. Why shouldn't he loan Centipede, I'd like to know!"

"Does he know the risks she ran?"

"No," said Cherry, regarding him curiously. And then bursting into a laugh, "Oh, say—but you *were* going it!"

"I seem to have that impression myself," he replied dryly.

She twisted toward him suddenly, her face eager.

"Why—oh, why, did you listen to me? It was rotten of me to urge you. I ought to have known that you were hurt. I oughtn't to have let you get on again when you were thrown. I've been worrying about it. Why did you do it, Dr. Sangree?"

Sangree sat looking past her, but it was not until she repeated the question that he answered her.

"You seemed so—ah—so anxious to be amused, I hated to disappoint you," he said with a grin. "Especially as I felt myself under—ah—somewhat definite obligations to your father."

"Oh—Dad!" she muttered with a frown. "Of course. But that needn't have made you take up a fool proposition like that, especially as you didn't know how to ride."

"Oh! er—" he objected quizzically. "But now that I come to think of it I must have ridden rather well."

She glanced at him soberly and then burst into laughter again.

"Say," she drawled at last as though in a kind of

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amazement at her sudden discovery, "you know, I like you."

Sangree grinned cheerfully. "Do you?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because you're a 'whiz'—"

Sangree's brows puzzled.

"What's a whiz?" he asked.

"Oh—anything that's all right. I thought you were a 'quitter'—that you were frightened, you know."

"I was. At the risk of being no longer a 'whiz,' I must say that I still am—more so than ever."

"But you did it. That's the point. I insist that you're a 'whiz' whether you want to be or not."

"I hope you won't ask me to ride again, though," he said. "I had no idea that a horse could be so violent."

She laughed. "I won't. I won't ever ask you to do anything you don't want to do, that is, except to come to my Tea."

"Why do you think I wouldn't want to do that?"

"Well, it isn't altogether your line, is it?"

"No. But I'll come."

She smiled at him charmingly. "And this means that I'm forgiven, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

There was a silence, which Cherry improved by lighting a cigarette. She hadn't been altogether at her ease, although she had succeeded in creating the impression of being so. But she now came to her point

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with the directness that was one of her characteristics.

"You know, Dr. Sangree," she went on, "that when I decide to like anybody, I want them to like *me*."

"Oh! And you mean—?"

She laughed gayly.

"That I want you to like me in spite of what people say—in spite of what I seem to be. Because I'm not nearly as bad as I wanted you to think I was——"

"Please. I beg of you——"

"Let me finish. I don't want you to believe because the girls of to-day aren't kept in lavender seclusion that they're going to the devil. Some of them may—but that's because they'd have gone there anyway. People don't change as much as that. The old people used to run the show and bring up a lot of smirking little hypocrites who knew a great deal more than they pretended to know, and did on the quiet a lot of things that we girls of to-day do openly." She waved her fingers airily. "Oh, don't think I'm apologizing for my crowd. I'm not. I'm just putting you straight on this: that the girls of to-day are no worse—if no better—than the girls that used to be. I know it. Because I'm one of them."

Sangree laughed. "Why should you suppose that I'm setting myself up as a censor on the young people of to-day?"

"Perhaps I don't suppose it. Perhaps I just feel, in view of a thing you saw one night, that I owe you this explanation. You know, Dicky *was* drunk. Dicky is a fool sometimes, but he's straight."

## *SANGREE BECOMES A "WHIZ"*

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"You mean morally, of course," said Sangree dryly. "Otherwise his sense of direction is—er—faulty."

She laughed. And then, "I suppose you don't believe me. I know he's not your sort," she said. "But I like Dicky. He's a 'whiz' too, and he eats out of my hand."

"Does one have to do that to preserve your friendship?" asked Sangree.

"Now you're laughing at me."

"No, I'm not. I was just thinking that I had already shown symptoms of doing the same thing."

"Say, that's ripping of you. Generous too after what happened. But I'm doing all I can to make amends, aren't I?"

She rose and tossed her cigarette into the bushes.

"I've got to go. Luncheon out at Piping Rock. But I'm glad you'd see me. Won't you come over as soon as you can? Not Sunday afternoons—that's a bore. 'Phone when you can get out. Wouldn't you like me to take you for a motor ride?"

"I would," said Sangree, "provided you don't go over a hundred miles an hour."

"I'll only go sixty, I promise you. Good-by."

She offered him her hand which he took with his left. It was a hard little hand, with a firm, boyish grip, the hand of friendship, he believed, of one "whiz" for another.

"Good-by," he muttered.

She took a few steps down toward the machine and then flashed a quick smile over her shoulder at him.

"Good-by again," she said. "And don't you believe

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everything you hear about the younger tribes of Manhattan or about me. Promise?"

"I promise."

"Good-by."

She put her foot on something and with a whir followed by a series of snorts and explosions she went down the drive in a gale of dust and disappeared among the trees along the highway. Sangree turned back at last toward his quiet chair and manuscript, with much the same attempt at mental readjustment with which one enters a doorway after having been exposed to a boisterous air. It surprised him how she had carried everything before her, fixing his status and her own with a definiteness which was bewildering and incredible. She had lifted him, at a bound, out of his slough of meditation into the wide empyrean of youth. For the moment he was no longer a many-lettered philosopher grown staid some years before his time, but a hopeful and amused spectator of the Human Comedy. For a new degree had been conferred upon him. He was now a "whiz."

He grinned as he took up his pipe and with difficulty filled it. What was there about this wild young creature which so compelled him? Was it her beauty, her vigor, her joy of life that reproached him in the name of the youth which had never been his? Or was it something even deeper than these—a spiritual quality that he saw in her, flashes of gentleness and self-reproach—a generosity and warm-heartedness which made outward and visible tokens of an inner grace

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habitually suppressed to meet the exigencies of an age of unreason? Whatever it was he was sure that the opinions that he had formed of his visitor had already been considerably modified and that he was now quite ready to forgive her for the share she had had in his undoing. Indeed he realized that he was committed to a kindly view of her behavior no matter what she did, and, curiously enough, he found himself quite willing to believe that she was not nearly so black as she had been painted. His blood tingled a little at the memory of her eyes which had been bent upon him with such a kindly blue. . . .

Heigho! He sighed just once for his vanished youth (he was thirty), and then, lighting his pipe, took up his proof sheets and began to read. But the sun glared upon the page and a little stray breeze, reminiscent of late summer, played merrily around his temples, reminding him that the migration of the Turkish tribes into Armenia, of which he read, had taken place many hundred of years ago. If the details of the family life, the implements of household usage, the ceremonials of these races had waited for hundreds of years to be given to the world, a few hours more or less could make no difference now. So he laid his proof sheets aside and gazed down the hill to where the blue waters of the Sound were ruffled with silver, while a line of forgotten verse that he had read years ago wafted back to him:

Once in the Future did I live,  
The Present seemed too old for me.

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The Future! Why had it never beckoned to him, except as an aggregation of days, weeks, months and years which he could improve by writing about the Past? It was that past in which he had lived while the good years of his youth had gone flitting by—six of them in the travail of a world that was sick unto death. But was he not still young? Was there not a future for him somewhere here among his own people outside the reading of dry scientific monographs or in the pages of his own reports of his achievements? What did his work mean? What was its value to the world to-day which was trembling on the brink of disaster? The words that he had just been trying to read on the pages seemed to come from a long distance, out of a deep abyss of time, and a realization came to him suddenly that the one who had written the labored technical phrases was himself. And by the light of this sudden revelation he saw himself as the larger world must now see him—an ancient, concentric piece of scientific machinery, absurdly out of place except in its proper relation to other pieces of machinery of its own kind.

He realized with something of a shock that the faculty for analysis and criticism carefully developed through years of study was applicable only to the problems of his own profession, and that it was not a fit scale with which to measure the larger activities of the world about him. For all his experience in dealing with events as they had come to him in other lands, he now felt himself singularly helpless when brought again

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face to face with the newer aspects of the present day among his own people in his own country. George Lycett had named him well—"the visitor from Mars"—and the awkwardness that he had felt in his social contacts had been unpleasantly developed in his helplessness in the hands of this gay young creature who had, it seemed, up to the present moment done precisely as she pleased with him. It astonished him how completely she had subjugated him by her smile—how willing he had been to accept her friendship on her own terms. And yet not for a moment did he doubt his own willingness to accept her offer. For she had flattered him. Other women had thanked him, dined him, praised him even, but no woman had ever flattered him as Cherry Mohun had done. She had touched a chord that had been silent for years and the melody remained. Cherry alone, of all the people that he had known, had discovered that Youth still sang in his heart.

When George Lycett returned with his wife for luncheon at home (for he was no longer in active business), they found David Sangree on the terrace, his proof sheets in play of the sportive breezes, his extinguished pipe bowl-downward in his teeth, as he peacefully slept. But he awoke at the sound of their voices and shaking himself like a shaggy wolfhound got up and followed them into the library. Beyond a casual inquiry as to his arm, his host asked no questions, seeming rather engrossed in thought, and it was not until luncheon was over and Mrs. Lycett had gone



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upstairs that the topic uppermost in George Lycett's mind was brought into the conversation.

"Hang it all, Sangree," he said with a sudden explosiveness which was unusual in one of his nature, "I don't suppose there's any use in keeping the matter from you. And it may be only a flash in the pan——"

"Nothing serious, I hope," said Sangree calmly.

"I hope not. People are always running around telling other people a lot of things that they don't want to hear. I never go into a club or an office that somebody isn't trying to take the joy out of life——"

"Human nature, Mr. Lycett. I hope it's nothing to affect your own fortunes."

"I wouldn't mind so much if it were only mine that it affected. But it may affect yours too."

"Mine! You mean——"

"Oh, it's about Mohun. There's a story going around that his affairs are not in as good shape as they might be. I don't know what the truth is because I wasn't able to get to the bottom of it. It's a mere rumor, of course. But you can realize that it didn't sound any too pleasant to me when I've not only gone pretty heavily into some of his enterprises, but put your money into them too."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Sangree slowly. "I hope your informant was mistaken."

"He may be. The information was of the vaguest, backed by no facts and I didn't dare to ask obvious questions for fear of spreading a story which may be

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unfounded. At Mohun's offices all was serene. But I'm a little uncomfortable just the same."

Sangree sipped his tea thoughtfully as he considered the opulence of the Mohun establishment and the careless confidence of his morning visitor.

"Of course you know more of Mr. Mohun's enterprises than I do," he said, "but the rumor seems rather incredible in the light of recent information. The Textile Mills Corporation was standing up very well last week."

"It slipped a few points this morning," said Lycett with a frown. "But of course that means nothing. The whole thing may be a game of some of Mohun's enemies to embarrass him or it may be a Bear raid carefully planned. Oh, I'm not much disturbed. It's only the thought of the possibilities of disaster with most of your eggs in one basket."

"Of course I could still sell out and not be much the loser," put in Sangree cheerfully.

"Oh, I don't counsel that—not just now, for a big block of stock like yours thrown on the market might have a bad effect if there is anything back of the story."

Sangree rose and clapped his hand on the back of his older friend.

"Well, I'm satisfied to let the matter rest if you are. And I won't hold you responsible if anything goes wrong. I like Mr. Mohun. I think he's a pretty big man and I'll take my chances."

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George Lycett rose and grasped his friend's hand. "I knew you'd take that view. But I'm glad I've told you. Wall Street is very jumpy these days, but that's no reason why we should be."

"Exactly." Sangree paused. "By the way, Miss Mohun stopped by this morning. She was sorry to miss you."

"Cherry! Bless her heart! A little ashamed of herself, eh?"

"Ashamed?"

"Well—contrite then. By Jove, Sangree, but you did put one over on her. The story of your race is all over the country—with Cherry coming out second-best. You beat her to it, my boy. A dog, a woman and a walnut tree—the more you beat 'em. . . . 'Pon my soul! You must have made a conquest!"

"You musn't poke jokes at the antique. Even a mummy has his dignity, Mr. Lycett," he laughed.

"I think I've been doing you an injustice," Lycett laughed. "Any mummy who receives roses and visits from the most popular little scapegrace in New York may consider himself very much alive, even if he goes to the extreme of almost killing himself to deserve the attention."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. And she isn't really a scapegrace, you know, Mr. Lycett. That's hardly fair—"

"I only called her that for the pleasure of having you contradict me," said Lycett.

## CHAPTER VI

### MORE "JAZZ"

**I**F any financial difficulties loomed in the path of the Mohun family the casual observer would never have suspected them. And indeed, after a further investigation of the rumor, George Lycett had come to the conclusion that the story was an invention of "interests" inimical to those James K. Mohun represented. The stocks which Lycett and Sangree held had recovered from their decline and were holding their own in the very unsteady and nervous market. Nor was there anything to be discovered in the demeanor of Mr. Mohun himself which could give the least color to the supposition that he was in any way embarrassed. And in the midst of a situation in Wall Street which every one described as being hazardous, Mr. Mohun casually announced his purchase of the Wetherby place at Newport as a birthday present to his wife, which had the effect of reassuring those timid persons whose ears are always open to disquieting information.

Cherry did not forget her offer to drive the "professorial antiquity" in her roadster, and several times before the Mohuns moved to town had taken Dr. Sangree for a spin almost the length of the Island and return. They were a queerly assorted pair, the early basis for their attraction being a mildly subjective

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curiosity constantly provoked by surprises. Cherry had discovered, under Sangree's tranquil exterior, a vein of quiet humor, somewhat ironic by choice, which stimulated her to constant mental agility in defense of the foibles of her age and generation, but she pitied him a little for his proficiency in the knowledge of so many things which seemed of the very slightest practical use in the world as she knew it. His omniscience was so completely without intuitions. She divined that her personality had attracted him and that the offer of her friendship so frankly given had raised the barriers of the reserve which had at first so unpleasantly affected her. But to her credit it may be said that she employed none of the tricks of the feminine trade. She would as soon have thought of flirting with the Obelisk in the Park, for the broken arm, a mute testimonial to his sincerity, still hung from his shoulder by a black silk handkerchief. But she amused herself by watching his reactions from the instances of her precocity—stories of Paris during the short period when she drove an ambulance, tales of conquest, social and sentimental, in which she showed him that she had learned more of life in three years than he had been taught in a lifetime.

Sangree's curiosity as to his newly-found friend was somewhat like that of a child who has discovered a toy in a dusty garret—the extraordinary thing being, not that he had found it again, but that he should have forgotten that it had even existed. There had been girls of Cherry Mohun's age before he had left Amer-

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ica. There must have been, of course. But he couldn't seem to recall with any definiteness what any of them had looked like. He was sure, at least, that none of them could have abandoned themselves to such utter frankness as Cherry Mohun had done. But he liked her amazingly, although he wasn't quite sure that he was ready to change an earlier opinion that what she really needed most was a sound spanking. She smoked with him, offered him her father's whisky, swore when she felt like it and gave him her opinions on matters which young women of a politer age would have relegated to their elders. But she charmed him none the less—much as a child would charm, by the spell of her valiant youth and the honesty of her point of view which, though not his, was worthy of a definite consideration. He found out that many young men were in love with her—Dickie Wilberforce, Harold Galbraith, Teddy Waring; but that none of them—not even the affluent Demi-John—had made so much as a dent upon the malleable surface of her affections. Only one man, whose name she would not give, attracted her as the others had not, a fellow she had met in Paris, then a sergeant in the Army, but now in business in New York, a man, he gathered from her remarks, who moved in a different social stratum.

But he could not believe, from the freedom with which she spoke of him, that here was the man of her choice. He had wonderful dark brown eyes, she told him, and a reputation for God knew what with the women. And when he asked her with his sober smile

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if she considered these as requisite matrimonial qualifications, she grinned cheerfully at the speedometer which already indicated an illegal speed and threw open the throttle. He was careful not to ask her pertinent questions after that. It seemed to him that she loved them all just as she loved all the world, even the rejuvenated ethnologist, who sat beside her gasping for his breath and trying to imagine that he shared the fascination of intense and dangerous speeds.

Not yet had he discovered why she was willing to waste the precious hours of dalliance with such as he, for no two people could have been more dissimilar. But there was no doubt that they got along beautifully. Already she had contrived to give his convalescence a value quite out of proportion to the inconvenience of his injury.

"And you're coming to my tea and my dance," she said on the eve of her departure for the town house. "You know, you promised!"

"I don't dance."

"Then go and learn. There's no reason why you should try to seem a hundred when you're only thirty."

"Who told you that?"

"Mr. Lycett. He secretly shares my ambition for you to be David Sangree instead of Rameses the Second."

He laughed. "And if I come, will you dance with me?"

"Rather. Say," she broke in frankly, "I do like to

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talk sense once in a while. I'm going to be bored stiff this winter—I know it—unless I go the limit."

"What do you mean by 'going the limit'?"

"Oh, doing unusual things to keep my mind off the stupid ones. I won't stick around teas. Mother can't make me. Dances, yes—but I'm not going to dance myself into a frazzle either. You'll help me out, won't you?"

"What do you mean?" he asked in surprise.

"Oh, if I want to be quiet, just come off with me out here for a drive once in a while? You're different. You've got a lot more sense than most people I know."

"Thanks."

"I mean it. And though you don't ever agree with me about things, you don't try to rub my faults in so that they hurt. I won't be reformed until I'm ready. I hate to be bored. Sometimes I wonder why you've never bored me. . . . I'm frank, aren't I?" she laughed. "But you don't. I suppose it's because you just let me talk about myself or else because you don't make love to me. I'd hate you to do that. . . . I wonder if you understand. I guess I like you just because you're different—because you give me something I've never had—just simple friendliness. We do hit it off though, don't we?" She finished with a smile as though demanding asseveration.

"Yes. I can't remember when I've had such a good time."

"I think sometimes you laugh *at* as well as with me.



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You mustn't do that. I'm a very serious person—really. You mayn't believe it but I feel things tremendously—good music for instance. It makes me all crawly inside. Then some one starts a jazz and it's all off. I wonder which is *me*, Dr. Sangree?"

"Perhaps you've never taken the time to try to find out."

"No, I haven't. I've always done what other people did. I didn't want to be left out. Mother didn't want me to either. She doesn't in the least mind what I do so long as the right people are doing it." She shrugged rather contemptuously. "I guess I haven't been clever enough to find out my own convictions, or strong enough to have lived up to them when I found them." She gave a sharp gasp. "But what does it matter?" she said almost fiercely. "I'm going to *live* and I'm going to be *myself*, whatever I am. I'm going to get everything I can out of life because when I die I'll be dead a long time. If there's good in me it ought to come out. If there's bad—" She frowned and was silent, then suddenly pressed the accelerator and the car shot violently forward.

"If there's bad?" roared Sangree above the racket.

"Then I'll probably go to the devil," she shouted in return.

About the middle of November the Mohuns opened their town house in Seventy-eighth Street. This was a little earlier than usual, on account of the many social activities incident to their daughter's début, which was to take place at a tea at the house, followed

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by a ball a few nights later at the Ritz. The round of teas had already begun, at many of which Cherry, with the rest of the season's crop of buds, had been invited to receive, and in spite of her dire threats to David Sangree she was doing her duty industriously, plying upholstered old ladies with salads and ices which they would have been much better off without, and providing choleric and disgusted old gentlemen with pale pink punch which had the semblance but not the substance of a better thing. That she beamed sweetly upon everybody and even said the graceful things expected of her was due more to the sage advice of her vigilant mother than to any natural inclination for the small talk of these occasions. But having made up her mind, according to the custom, that it was necessary for her to go through with the thing up to a certain point, she had succumbed to the inevitable, sacrificing day after day of gorgeous autumn weather upon the altar of maternal ambition.

Nevertheless she found opportunities to run off to the place at Oyster Bay, which had been kept open, for a ride or a drive with Jack or Teddy or Harold, and one glorious morning Dicky had taken her up in the new plane. He proposed to her, for the fourteenth time, while they were planing down against a brisk wind at an altitude of three thousand feet, and swore that he wouldn't come to earth unless she accepted him. She promised that she would "think about it" if he looped the loop, which he did. But she was still "thinking about it" a week later and Dicky had again

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taken to drink. But the strange friendship of the mummy and the humming bird continued in spite of obstacles. Sangree's convalescence was slow and he did not go to Cherry's dance. But, when his arm was fit to use, he took private dancing lessons and appeared timidly enough after Christmas at one of the smaller dances. It was given by Mrs. Percival Gartley, the giddy aunt of Eugenia Armitage, and was to be a very lively affair. The name of Mrs. Gartley, Cherry had confided, was marked with three stars in the "Flappers' Blue Book." And when, somewhat mystified, Sangree had inquired as to her meaning, she laughed.

"Oh, that's how we tell which houses to go to for a good time. Our crowd keeps a record. It's a state secret. You won't tell, will you? . . . Three stars mean cocktails and champagne; two stars, just cocktails; one star, sherry or port on the table. No stars at all—just White Rock or lemonade. Frosts! We avoid 'em. Understand?"

Sangree did. The plan was ingenious and apparently worked to perfection. Houses blackballed by the young scapegraces were relegated to the limbo of the undesirable and many a hostess who had otherwise provided lavishly was to find herself wondering at the slim attendance of the desirable few who made up the gay younger set.

Whether or not Mrs. Gartley had been initiated into the secret of this cabal, Sangree soon discovered that the dance fully met the approval of Cherry's crowd.

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Though most of those invited were débutantes and their attendant swains, this hostess had had no compunctions about providing all the liquid refreshment necessary to satisfy the most exacting requirements of her pampered guests. Mrs. Percival Gartley was very wealthy, having possessed the knack of marrying wealthy husbands, two of whom she had buried in the churchyard, the third in Reno. The present incumbent, a small, spare man, had defied the inevitable for three years, but was now showing unmistakable symptoms of physical disintegration. His lady still waxed fat and amiable. Age could not wither nor custom stale. The ruddy flame that burned in her was extinguishable. She greeted Sangree with her florid smile and passed him on to Eugenia, who emerged rather nakedly from a huge bouquet of orchids which she carried. Mr. Sangree! Of course. Cherry had spoken of him so often. Any friend of Cherry's was *her* friend too. Had he been doing any Cossack riding lately? She adored Cossacks. They were so picturesque and didn't seem to care whether they fell off or not. How was his arm? Quite strong enough to dance with? If he danced as well as he rode, she hoped he'd ask *her* to dance later on.

Sangree bowed himself away, aware of the mischievous twinkle in her eyes, and presently found Cherry in the ballroom, trying to achieve the impossible feat of dancing with six men at once. He watched them cutting in, one after the other, and at once gave up any hope he may have had of dancing with

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her. But suddenly as she was making a turn she espied him and guided her partner of the moment in his direction.

"Hello, Rameses!" she greeted him cheerfully. "Won't you dance with me?"

Awkwardly he took the place of the young fellow she had deserted and stepped out manfully.

"This is awfully good of you," he said quietly.

"How is the arm? Feeling all right? Why, how nicely you dance!"

"You won't think so if I tread on your instep," he muttered, struggling gamely.

"You're a peach to come. I want you to meet the crowd. That was Dicky I was dancing with. And that's Violet Everard, over there. I know you'll like Vi. She's adorable. You'll cut in often, won't you? Good-by."

And almost before he could offer a monosyllable in reply she had danced away without losing a step, in the arms of another man, leaving Sangree, rather bewildered at the rapidity of things, in the middle of the ballroom floor, a prey to the violence of the enthusiasts. But he extricated himself by skipping and side-stepping with his newly discovered agility and breathlessly reached the haven of an alcove at the windows, where he gazed upon the scene. The fellow Cherry had danced off with was not a regular of Cherry's crowd. He was tall, dark, with a strong chin, rather heavy lips and brows, and his figure filled his evening clothes compactly. Later on, while the

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orchestra was silent, he asked Eugenia Armitage who he was.

"Oh, don't you know? That's Cherry's latest—Bruce Cowan. She met him in Paris—he was an orderly for some civilian Gold Hat or other."

"Oh," muttered Sangree.

"He's not my sort at all, or hers either. But Cherry *would* have him asked. I've no patience with her."

"They seem on excellent terms," ventured Sangree.

"He's the limit, I think. He's a demonstrator for an automobile concern," she finished with a sniff.

"I've no doubt he's—ah—a very capable demonstrator," said Sangree, rubbing his chin.

"Well, I wish he'd demonstrate in his garage," finished 'Genie scornfully.

She seemed to have rather strong opinions upon the subject, but Sangree made no further comment. He was far out of his depth as it was and only kept upon the surface of the social swim by treading water violently. 'Genie, aware of his diffidence, with one of those fine impulses that sometimes find light in a ballroom, offered to sit out a dance with him and they found a quiet spot in the conservatory.

"I heard all about how you got your broken arm, Dr. Sangree," she began without preface. "I think it was corking of you. Do you know that Cherry likes you very much?"

"Does she? Does she?" he asked, blinking through his glasses. "I'm glad of that. You know I—well,

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I've been out of touch with—ah—this sort of thing for so many years that I—ah—I feel like a fish out of water. But you're all—ah—very enchanting."

"Please tell me that I have handsome eyes, Dr. Sangree. Everybody does. I have, haven't I?"

"Of—of course—very handsome. They're blue, too—aren't they?" he gasped.

"Too—!" She threw back her head and laughed with a full throat—"but not so adorable as Cherry's—"

"Oh, I say. I didn't mean—why, you're *all* adorable, you know—each in a different way."

"In what other way am I adorable? Please tell me!" she said gayly.

"Well, you—you have a—" he stammered. And then, "There's a fine soul behind your mischief," he said gently.

She looked at him with whimsical eyes which suddenly grew softer.

"Really? You think so? That's bully of you. I'm sure you mean it. But please tell me about yourself, won't you?"

He smiled and shrugged. "I'd very much rather hear all about *you*."

"*Me*. Oh, there's nothing to tell. I'm just a Reno orphan, dependent on the whim of a wealthy aunt."

"How terrible!" he said genuinely.

She looked at him thoughtfully, aware of the sober note.

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"Isn't it? But one gets callous, you know. I think we all get that way—even Cherry, a little. Why even Vi—you know Vi Everard, don't you? She's got a case on Bob Mohun. She was the most ingenuous creature three months ago. Now she's just as careless as the rest of us." She shrugged her thin shoulders, with pretty irony. "Well, what's the odds, so long as you're happy?"

Sangree puzzled for a moment.

"Happiness is a state of mind, isn't it?" he asked at last.

"Yes—if one has a mind. But most girls' brains get joggled down into their feet."

"And if your feet are happy," he said, "you think you're happy all over."

"Yes, I guess that's it—" She broke off with a quick shrug and rose. "But I don't want to think. Why do you make me think, Dr. Sangree?"

"My dear child—" he began.

"Come," she said. "There's the music again. I've got to dance—to dance."

They reached the dancing floor and had taken only a few steps when somebody seized her from him, almost by main force. He gasped and sought the alcove by the windows again.

He hadn't intended staying for supper, but these few interludes had piqued his interest. So this was Cherry's soldier friend about whom she had been so reticent. The war had been a great leveler and it



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hadn't been the fashion to be snobbish. But the prejudices of Eugenia Armitage were informing. Sangree wasn't sure from the brief glimpse he had had of the fellow that he didn't agree with her. For all his fine shoulders Bruce Cowan gave an impression of being fashioned of a baser clay than most of those young people Sangree saw about him, for after all they seemed rather a wholesome lot, exhibiting only errors of taste rather than of morals.

But he made up his mind to stay for supper on the odd chance of a chat with Cherry and improved the moments that remained by seeking the men's dressing room and a cigarette. He found the stairway blocked by couples *en tête à tête*, many of them sharing cigarettes, and at the top of the stairway, where he took the wrong turn, he stumbled into a dark corner where there was a window seat out of sight of the others. There a girl and a boy were embracing each other with the innocent abstraction of two turtle doves.

"Heigho!" thought Rameses. "Mere force of habit. They've forgotten that their feet aren't dancing."

But even in the dark he had seen that the girl was Cherry's friend, Gloria Towne. He didn't remember having met the boy. After all—a kiss—what was it? A trifle, an airy nothing, a mere symbol of affection. Perhaps this boy and girl cared for each other. He hoped so. It was such a pretty tableau. But at Sangree's sudden appearance the turtle doves had spread their wings and fluttered, rather startled, down the stairs to the ballroom.

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In the dressing room he found several youths that he had met. There was Scotch, Rye and Club Soda on a table and the conversation was not of Shakespeare and the musical glasses.

"She's perf' lil pippin," one of them was saying over and over in a kind of amiable soliloquy as he reclined in a morris chair. "Pity she ain't in this set. She'd show 'em. Think I'll marry her, jus' same. Damf-don't."

"Oh, shut up, Bob. Nobody cares about your illicit affections."

"'licit! Who says 'licit?" said the other, glancing around heavily. "Don't I tell you I love—hic—hic—I know wha's matter 'th you, Harry," he muttered as the other boy laughed. "You're jus' fuller 'n goat. Tha's wha's matter."

His voice subsided into a mumble and presently he slept. But as the boy's head fell back Sangree discovered that the youthful inebriate was Cherry Mohun's brother Bob.

At supper, which was served in the dining room, hall and conservatory, Cherry espied her friend wandering absently about and made him sit at her table with Eugenia Armitage, Phoebe Macklin, Dicky Wilberforce, John Chichester and Bruce Cowan.

He found the food more substantial than the conversation which, like the wine, sparkled in tiny bubbles and burst into nothing. But every one seemed to be having a good time and soon the visitor found himself falling under the spell of their gayety and irre-

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sponsibility, which for the moment had rescued him from his Cave of Adullam. It was Cherry Mohun's friend, Bruce Cowan, whose laughter first was loudest, for Dicky became quieter the more he drank, and John Chichester, as every one knew, never was more than mildly exhilarated over champagne. Cherry's eyes glowed, Phoebe grew sentimental, and 'Genie's tongue mocked, but they were all decorous, and when the fourth bottle came Cherry sent it away. It seemed that in this particular Olympus the gods had their limitations.

But at some of the other tables near by the fun was now furious. Sylvia Wetherill and Harold Galbraith were trying an imitation of *pas de deux* amid applause and Teddy Waring did a juggling act for which he was famous. Too much encouragement, however, resulted in his ruin, for at the last both he and the caterer's crockery ended in disaster upon the floor.

The crash was rather startling and people rose and made their way toward the ballroom as though with an awakening sense of responsibility to the real business of the hour, which was to dance—to one step, to side step, to trip, to glide, to toddle until their weary feet would no longer hold them. Sangree waited for one more turn with Cherry, and, while he waited, the great event of the evening took place. He thought the expenditure had already been lavish enough:—the decorations of wistaria blossoms, amongst which a hundred canaries in their cages warbled and

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twittered excitedly, the huge clusters of American Beauty roses, the orchestra of thirty pieces, the best exponents of the art of syncopation that sophisticated New York could offer.

But now, as the handclapping for the last measure had ceased, the trap-drummer had finished the inevitable "*tum-te-tum-tum—tum—tum*," and the trombone had given its cynical laugh, an expectant hush fell upon the dancers. For the velvet curtains at the end of the room flew open and, with a fanfare from the brass instruments, a Pierrot leaped forth. He was recognized at once—the great Kadnikov of the Russian Ballet—as with gesture and dance he cleared the floor, while the orchestra, showing that it was capable of music of a better sort, launched itself gayly into the ballet music of "Coppelia." Another gesture from Kadnikov, the curtains parted again and a great flowerpot rolled into the room, pulled by a group of girls in tights, dressed as the pages of some sort of Fairy Court. In the flowerpot was a huge rosebud of papier maché, which, at a gesture and prayer in pantomime from the Pierrot, slowly opened its petals revealing at last a dainty Pierrette peeping out.

At a signal she sprang forth. It was the ballerina, Balkova the Wonderful. She met Pierrot. They kissed. He grew ardent. She repulsed him. She fled. He followed—all to the cadence of the music. Here was the very apotheosis of the dance, grace and joy in poetry, music and color. Pierrot caught his quarry

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at last and then the fairy pages emerged again and joined in the ballet under the shifting colors of calcium lights which flowed over the dancers like a veil of quicksilver. To David Sangree it was all very beautiful and 'Genie by his side gave a gasp of dismay as the ballroom fell into a sudden darkness. When the lights went on the dancers had disappeared.

Applause, a repetition of the ballet, at the end of which the trombone laughed derisively again and in a moment the orchestra swept into a popular tune which brought the real actors in this human comedy upon the floor. Balkova was great, but who could resist the lilt of such a "toddle"?

Sangree turned away. After poetry, this was doggerel. Cherry seemed to have disappeared, but he found her later coming down the stairs, a thoughtful expression on her face.

"I've been looking everywhere for you—to thank you and to say good night," he said.

"Are you going?" she asked listlessly. "I'm sorry."

"Is something bothering you?" he asked.

"No. Yes. That is—oh—something terrible has happened, Dr. Sangree——"

"Anything that I—?" he began.

"No. Nothing. It's just Vi—and I'm so awfully fond of her——"

"You mean that she's——"

"Just ill. She hasn't a very strong head. The champagne—she's so silly. . . . I hope nobody noticed."

"Can't I take her home——?"

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"No. No. That would be fearful. The Everards are terribly strict. 'Genie's going to keep her here. Please don't say anything. I know you won't. Good night."

## CHAPTER VII

### CHICHESTER CONFIDES

**A**MONG David Sangree's social assets was an important club, the Olympian. He had kept up his membership during the years of his wanderings, more in deference to the wishes of his dead father, than to any desire to avail himself of its privileges. He had been elected in his twenty-first year, in accordance with the custom, but had rarely been inside its doors, until his recent return to New York. Recluse and student by habit, his social intercourse had been confined to those persons with whom his studies had thrown him.

It was, therefore, with a feeling of some restraint that he had taken up the threads of acquaintance-ship and consanguinity which had for so many years flown at loose ends. There were old friends of his father's, of course, now rapidly diminishing in number, cousins almost forgotten, a Harvard classmate or two, with whom he found it agreeable to speak of other days, but there had been little time to spare for a club until his book was in the hands of the printer ready to be launched into the little backwash of the literary sea where works such as his found their haven. Three—perhaps four—hundred people would read it and give him much intimate approbation, but the newspapers

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and literary review would dismiss it with a line and the great American public would continue in blissful ignorance that it, or he, even existed.

But, the proofs out of his hands, Sangree formed the habit of dropping in at the Olympian in the late afternoon to read the papers or to chat with George Lycett who still continued, after a fashion, to be his mentor and guide. He found, too, that a number of the young men whom he had met during the season were to be found there in the billiard or card rooms, bemoaning their fate at having been born in a country which could see fit to deprive its citizens of their rights as individuals, which meant that they were thirsty and didn't care who knew it. The attendance at the Olympian, as at other clubs, had been much diminished by the prohibition and the large rooms which had formerly hummed with the sounds of pleasant voices were now almost deserted except at the luncheon hour. Its members had engagements elsewhere. Perhaps they went home to their wives and families. But they did not make of "the Morgue," as they called it, a meeting place or a refuge from "the cares that infest the day."

And indeed the lofty ceilings of the huge rooms, designed for dignity and beauty, seemed to absorb all sounds of conversation, and footsteps upon the marble hallway gave forth a vaultlike echo which made the name the younger men had given the place seem most fitting. The silence of the reading room was interrupted only by the quiet snores of respectable, if weary, old gentlemen who had dozed over their newspapers. In a way



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the atmosphere of the place suited Sangree admirably. He found some profit in the library, where at odd moments for diversion he browsed over Ferrero or plowed through Hesiod, or when in a philosophic mood dipped into the "Maxims" of Publius Syrus. There, sometimes, Mr. Lycett found him and led him down against his will into the company of his fellow man, even if he were only Harold Galbraith or Teddy Waring. This, in accordance with the desire, so aptly expressed by Cherry Mohun, that the Seeker after Truth should become David Sangree instead of Rameses the Second.

Of the acquaintanceships which Sangree resumed, that with John Chichester was least to his liking. But the older man, for no reason that Sangree could discover except the relationship that had existed between John Chichester the elder and Sangree's father—who had been the lawyer for the Chichester estate—saw fit to seek him out whenever he appeared and to make him the recipient of confidences in which Sangree was neither interested nor amused. For there was no way of avoiding these attentions. Chichester seemed to see in Sangree a creature both amiable and sane. But if David Sangree were lacking in intuitions with regard to the feminine psychology as Cherry Mohun had suspected, he had, in his wanderings, picked up a shrewd faculty for estimating the value of men. He wouldn't have chosen John Chichester as a boon companion. There wasn't anything that he had ever heard about the man to provoke his admiration, unless, per-

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haps, his work on the committees in placing the various loans during the War, for he bore the reputation of having a good head for business. And there was much of an unpleasant nature connected with his name. But Sangree was as reticent in his antipathies as in his likings, for the sight of suffering had made him kind, and he had no wish to offend a man who so frankly offered his friendship. So he listened while Chichester talked, spent an evening at the great house on the Park, where Mrs. Chichester still presided with an old-fashioned elegance, the dignity of which did not save it from being dull.

But Chichester kept another apartment further down town where he lived *en garçon* and where dinners of much less elegance and dignity were provided. Sangree had discovered that, except in so far as his income had been affected by the taxes and the depreciation of his securities, the Great War had passed over John Chichester without changing so much as a hair of his head or a perception within it. He was a man of the world in its lesser rather than its greater sense, and, aside from the family and business duties required of him, which he assumed with some punctilio, he had dedicated his life to the pursuit of pleasure.

But, as he admitted to Sangree with much concern, he was now growing older. His stomach wasn't what it used to be. The sentimental adventure jaded him. His mother wanted him to marry.

Sangree listened in surprise to the confession, the frankness of which he was sure had been stimulated

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by an excellent dinner ("Three stars, Flappers' Blue Book"), which had preceded a dance that Chichester had declined.

"She says I've got to have children," he confided. "Old name and all that sort of thing. Terrible responsibility—old name and money. Have to be on your guard all the time against scheming mothers and ambitious daughters. Damned nuisance, matchmakers."

Ha! Ha! Girls of another sort had been more in his line. Nothing expected of a chap except money. That was easy. But marriage!

"You know, Sangree," he went on in a lowered tone, "I like you. Sensible sort of chap. If your father was alive I'd probably talk to him. You're the hereditary confidant of the Chichesters. You don't mind, do you?"

Sangree shrugged. "My opinions are worthless."

"You don't mind listening?"

"No."

"Well, you know. I *have* been going it rather strong. . . . Women are just one damned opportunity after another. . . . Pretty things! I never could resist 'em. They weren't made to be resisted. . . . But then I've come to the end of my rope. I've got to stop philandering about and settle down. I really want to, you know. . . . And I'm not such a bad sort. I'd go straight in double harness, I think. . . . But, damn it all! Sangree, a man defies the Fates when he thinks of marrying nowadays—that is, if he thinks of

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marrying in the younger crowd—and you know I'm not the kind to be satisfied with a spinster aunt. I like 'em when they're young and I like 'em when they're irresponsible, but I can't let the *mater* in for a daughter-in-law who would turn the town house upside down and make a country club out of Roslyn Towers. She wouldn't stand for that, you know. She has her dignity and so has the name."

As he paused Sangree shrugged.

"You should have married before the marriageable females had become so—tempestuous," he ventured.

"Quite so. But then, I didn't. Oh, I don't mind their being tempestuous—or even ill-mannered; of course the War brought on all that. But I do object to their airs of familiarity with men, their damnable omniscience and self-sufficiency. It goes against the grain. I know my way about with women. I've always tried to divide 'em into two classes—those one married and those one didn't. But now, devil take me if I can tell one class from the other. Hang it all, a man can't take a wife as he takes a mistress—*tête baissée*, you know."

"But their airs of familiarity," Sangree found himself saying rather to his own surprise, "aren't they the very tokens of innocence?"

"Hang it all! Sangree, you've met a lot of these young people. What d'ye think of them? Tell me. I'd like to know."

"I've told you that my opinions have no value."

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"But they have. I know you're not my sort. I'm hardened. But they must rather shock a chap like you."

Sangree lighted his cigarette deliberately before he replied.

"It takes a good many kinds of people to make up a world," he said with a slow smile. "Your little world is merely a reflection of the larger one. There must be bad little angels even in heaven and I'm sure that there are good little devils in the other place."

"Oh, I don't say most of 'em aren't straight. But do you know the stories they tell about the Meriwether girl?"

"No, and I don't think I care to hear," said Sangree.

"But you do know that the little Everard kid gets 'stewed' at every party—"

"Ah—"

"And that the Towne girl thinks no more of kissing a boy than she does of—"

"Really, Chichester, I'd rather keep my illusions if you don't mind."

"Illusions?" muttered the older man—with a shrug. "I didn't know any man could have illusions nowadays."

"Well, I have," he said cheerfully. "I prefer to think of these little acquaintances of yours and mine as children who should be spanked and put to bed. Besides, I don't like mentioning names. If you don't mind—"

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Sangree made a motion as though to rise but Chichester laid a hand on his arm.

"Oh, I say, I thought every one knew."

"Gossip of this sort doesn't interest me."

"It would, if you were thinking of marrying one of 'em."

"But then I'm not, you see. The marks of—ah—condescension I have received," he said with dry humor, "are merely flattering to my years, Chichester, not to my—ah—seductiveness."

Chichester grinned but he pulled jerkily at his small wisp of mustache.

"You know I envy you your illusions, Sangree. It doesn't pay to know too much. When you've knocked about as I have you lose your faith——"

"That's a pity," said Sangree. "But isn't one's faith in the virtue of others merely a—ah—reflection of one's faith in one's own?"

"Eh? What's that? Faith in one's own virtue? By George! Maybe. I wonder." He leaned forward, his brows tangled.

Sangree hesitated for a long moment and then, scarcely conscious of his own earnestness, "I won't let myself believe that the whole younger crowd is going to the devil," he said, "because some—ah—silly little fool drinks more than is good for her."

Having said the words it was too late to recall them, but it was with something of a sense of shock that Sangree realized how greatly his point of view had changed in the few months since his return to America.

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The very phrases he had once used to George Lycett, but with what a different interpretation! He was aware dimly of John Chichester's voice breaking on his retrospection with a note of livelier optimism.

"Righto! old chap. Glad to hear you say that. That's what I've been wanting to think. That's what I do think, by Jove. But they care so damned little what either of us thinks. Just full of animal spirits—fire of life and—er—all that sort of thing. No harm in 'em, though—what? Just spoiled driving on a loose snaffle. A little of the curb and they'll come down to riding-school manners—"

"That might depend on who did the curbing," said Sangree.

"Right you are. Oh, there's a way to manage 'em. Responsibility. Position. Dignity to live up to."

He laid an impressive hand on his companion's knee. "See here, Sangree. I might as well tell you. It's no secret. The girl I'm going to marry is Cherry Mohun."

Sangree couldn't restrain a start of incredulity. The information was surprising enough in the light of what he knew of Cherry and the opinions which she had recently expressed as to the attentions of Mr. John Chichester, who was, as he conceived, the very last person that the girl could be thinking of. The look of astonishment in his face faded into a grin as he slowly relaxed on the leather divan.

"Ah," he muttered, "you're lucky, Chichester."

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"I knew you'd agree, old chap. Gorgeous girl! Just a little out of hand at home. But then, she'll age a bit."

Sangree thought for a moment and then with a whimsical smile—"I appreciate your confidences. Would you mind telling me when it's to be announced?"

"I say, you're going a little fast, old man," laughed Chichester. "We're not engaged. I haven't even spoken to her yet."

"Oh?" gasped Sangree. "I see."

"But the *mater* is with me. Charming woman, Mrs. Mohun. Very sensible. Spoils her daughter a little—but then, who wouldn't?"

"Yes, very charming." Sangree turned around, toward his confidant with a sudden jerk of exasperation. "See here, Chichester, it occurs to me that before you get so—ah—so damned cocksure of yourself, you'd better say a word or two to Miss Mohun herself."

"Oh—ah—er—yes, of course, Cherry! Well, rather. I will—when the right time comes. Can't move too fast in a thing like that. Nurse her along with the *mater* helping. Ah, she's keen for it and why wouldn't she be? Ambitious woman, a little dazed by the prospect, I think—it's what she's been aiming for ever since she's lived here—a brilliant match. I *would* be that, you know. Besides—" he lowered his voice and spoke in a serious tone, "besides—you know, Jim Mohun might come a crash at any time."

Sangree was no longer listening indifferently. The



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assurance of his companion, which had begun by amusing him, seemed now to have gained a deeper significance.

"You believe that?" he asked.

"Yes. He's shaky. He's been so for months. I wouldn't mention it to any one but you. But I know you're a friend of the family. The Chichester estate has some of his paper, most of it secured by stock. But if this story gets out nothing can keep his companies from touching rock bottom. Mohun has been slipping up on the interest he owes us. Well, you know the way I feel about things. I don't want to be hard on him on account of the family—on account of Cherry—so I've let things drift along." Sangree glanced up quickly, surprising a rather shrewd look in Chichester's expression. And he listened with a keener ear for his own misfortunes. "Some of his concerns are making money," Chichester went on with a careless shrug, "but he was deep in coppers, and you know where coppers are. There are some people who aren't going to be so—er—friendly as I am and money grows tighter every week. Some people thought the election would help matters, but it hasn't helped. Now they say March or April will see this country through the worst. But I don't believe that Jim Mohun can last that long——"

"That's very unfortunate," said Sangree deeply perturbed—"very unfortunate."

"Yes, isn't it? Unfortunate for every one concerned. I'm speaking very freely. I hope you'll con-

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sider it in confidence. I'm merely telling you the truth. It's inside information. Mohun still carries his bluff. He's whistling to keep his courage up. He has to. But the first intimation the public gets of this will bring an explosion. And then—"

Chichester made a suggestive motion of slender shoulders and thin fingers ceilingward.

Sangree bent his head in thought, his dream of a scientific expedition that he had expected to make at his own expense, now vanished in the light of this astounding revelation. And yet he saw no reason to doubt its truth. John Chichester's sources of information were denied to his companion.

"You seem to be affected," said Chichester, curious as to Sangree's somber expression.

Sangree shrugged and wagged his head.

"Rather," he replied quietly. "Most of the money I have in the world is in Textile Mills——"

"You?" broke in the other. "You! How on earth——?"

Sangree had a sudden sense of puerility before this fellow whose opinions he had held so lightly.

"George Lycett. I left all my affairs in his hands when I went away," he gasped. "Textile Mills promised well in war times."

"War brides! He capitalized those——" Chichester broke off with an air of restraint. "My dear chap! And you're in deep? Where was the stock when you bought it?"

"Ninety-three. And it's twenty-one to-day."

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"How many shares?" asked the other.

"Roughly—two thousand," he said awkwardly.

Chichester emitted a tenuous whistle.

"Holy Smoke!" he muttered.

"There were some new contracts, large orders—" protested Sangree helplessly.

"Moonshine. The big plant is all but closed down now. My advice is to sell damn quick. Get what you can, a hundred shares at a time."

"You know, you've rather taken the wind out of me, Chichester," said the victim weakly.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know I was bringing you bad news. You student chaps haven't any business in the stock market. And Lycett! He fell under Mohun's spell, I suppose? It's a damned pity—the more so because Mohun means well. But he got rich too fast."

Sangree rose. The blow had hit him hard and there seemed no possible chance that Chichester could be mistaken. What would he have to gain by lying to Sangree who had made his painful admission after learning the facts? They must be true.

"Thanks, Chichester," he said steadily as he offered his hand. "I'll have to think this out. There's nothing to do to-night of course——"

"I'm sorry, old man. Don't take my advice unless you want to, but it's the best I can give you. I wish you had come to me at first. Come to me down town if there's any way I can help."

Sangree shook his hand, bade him good night and still rather bewildered went out into Fifth Avenue to

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try to face his situation calmly. A light drizzle was falling, through which the traffic signals blazed, portentous. The street, the joyous aspect of which he had recently come to consider with a real affection, seemed suddenly to have grown strangely unfriendly. His patrimony—the greater part of it—gone? It was unbelievable. And yet what other interpretation could he put on what he had just heard? John Chichester had suddenly achieved a new dignity quite out of proportion to Sangree's familiar conception of him, the dignity which power gives to worthy and unworthy alike. Money! That was Chichester's empire into which Sangree had strayed tilting at windmills. Chichester's millions, soundly placed in bonds and mortgages, turned the ridicule that had been in Sangree's heart into something like respect. Sangree had never cared about money, had never even thought about it, so long as he could find enough for his scientific projects and his own modest needs, and he had been willing to leave the administration of it in the hands of others. But he realized with a sense of sudden shock that not having money was now going to matter very much indeed.

It was too late to call up George Lycett. There was nothing to be done until morning—what even then, seemed now very uncertain. He couldn't blame Lycett for having been carried off his feet by the magic of James Mohun's earlier successes. And it was difficult, as he recalled the various interviews which he had had with the capitalist, to believe that the Mohun

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star could be no longer in the ascendant. And yet, from what Chichester had told him, it was only the spell of the man's personality which still kept him afloat on the troubled waters of finance, the under-currents of which seemed so familiar to John Chichester.

David Sangree filled his pipe, a very disreputable Italian briar, but strangely sweet in its counsels, then pulled his hat down over his eyes and strode rapidly north and into the phantom reaches of the Park.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PORT OF DREAMS

**T**O the casual observer it seemed that Alicia Mohun's Argosy, with all sail spread, was heading for the Port of Dreams where with anchor down in safe harbor she would rest at last from her ventures along the uncharted social sea.

John Chichester had spoken in very certain terms and, following an old-world custom which had been relegated to the dust heap of social antiquities, had asked her permission to address his attentions to her daughter. Mrs. Mohun had, of course, with becoming reservations, assented to his proposals and had at last professed her willingness to do what she could to prosper his suit. Of course Cherry was very young, almost 'too young, indeed, to be able to decide so momentous a question with wisdom or discretion, and for that reason she had advised Mr. Chichester that it would be better if he deferred his definite proposal to Cherry herself for a while—at least until the experiences of her first season in society had rounded some of the sharp edges of her exuberance and immaturity. It was greatly to be regretted that the customs of the day permitted girls so great a license, but of course, as Mr. Chichester must know, Mrs. Mohun was powerless in the face of almost united acquiescence on the part of mothers less discriminative than herself. The

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customs of a day might beguile her daughter, might temporarily set at naught the careful teachings which Cherry had received in a conventional—one might almost say, a provincial—Christian home, but Cherry was, as her mother knew, an extraordinarily sensible creature who responded readily to kindness. A man such as Mr. Chichester, a man with inherited traditions and a knowledge of the world, would be just the influence that Cherry needed to enable her to see life as it really was, its duties, dignities and responsibilities, and emerge at a proper time from the chrysalis of adolescence into a broad and useful womanhood.

Alicia Mohun raised her pretty eyebrows and laid her rose-petal fingers along John Chichester's coat sleeve.

"Oh, don't think I'm apologizing for Cherry's unreflecting infatuation for the foibles of the day—"

"My dear Mrs. Mohun—"

"Or for her captious indifference to conventions which, however stupid, are really necessary evils."

"Stupid—yes. Who cares?"

"These are the heritage of her unfortunate generation. Cherry merely does what others do. If she didn't, she would be distinctly out of everything."

"Oh—of course—"

"But what I do want you to understand, Mr. Chichester, is that her apparent indifference to your attentions, her preference for the companionship—may I say it?—of boys and girls of her own age—is born, not of dislike for you personally, but of an embarrass-

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ment—even awkwardness in the society of one who suggests a larger view of life. She *does* like you, Mr. Chichester, very much. She *always* speaks of your roses *so* gratefully and she *does* dance with you frequently, doesn't she?"

"Not nearly so much as I would like—"

"She will—as she knows you better, as she learns the high motives which actuate you—"

"I hope so."

"I'm *sure* of it. But I counsel you not to be discouraged by the *insouciance* of youth—you can't reproach her for that, can you? Just try to be patient with her—and kind. She will respond in time."

Alicia Mohun laughed prettily as they rose. Then whispered at his ear, "And remember that *I* am your ally."

"I will remember," said Chichester.

This conversation had taken place in the picture gallery of the Chichester's house on Central Park, where Cherry, much to her chagrin, had been invited to lunch. The only guests were Cherry and her mother and in any other household the gathering would have been most informal, but at the Chichester house even the entering of a room was attended by ceremonies. Mrs. Chichester who had been a Bartou, prided herself on her lineage, which was even better than the Chichesters', and kept her state even in informal matters. To Alicia Mohun, the footmen, which she had never had the courage to affect, were a part of the dusky grandeur of the great mansion,—a house which repre-



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sented all that was expensive in the architecture of the seventies, though it still left much to be desired in point of simplicity and proportion. And yet the footmen belonged to it as they would not have belonged to the house at Oyster Bay or the smaller place in town. The Mohuns, mother and daughter, had been shown in and announced in faultless cockney to where the great lady, sibilant in black silk and jet beads, rose from the red damask of her gilded chair, heavily leaning on her ebony cane, and greeted them.

Her cordiality was tinged delicately with condescension, as a lofty mountain, which she resembled not a little in other respects, peers above its clouds. To Alicia Mohun who had long scrambled through the foothills to lesser peaks, she wore an aspect of serenity which seemed already to take the visitors into its keeping. She gave them her plump fingers and indicated chairs at either side of her which were placed swiftly by a shadowy figure who vanished immediately.

On the whole, Cherry behaved very well, in spite of the fact that the somber magnificence was very depressing. And though no word had been uttered by her mother as to the motives which lay behind this hospitality, Cherry was not too stupid to realize that she was there to be inspected by the old lady as the object of John Chichester's matrimonial intentions. Her first impulse was to say something shocking which would break the ice of this glacial atmosphere—or forever congeal it; but, with a generous impulse, she considered the dilemma in which she might place her

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poor mother whose attitude during the preliminaries of the conversation filled her with a bewildered if slightly amused admiration. And so in a moment she became absorbed in a contemplation of Mrs. Chichester's three chins, and in the not unkindly glances of her small eyes which flashed this way and that, like little green midges in the sunshine.

Fortunately, John Chichester entered at this moment, luncheon was announced and they went into the lofty room with its huge gray fireplace which had been brought from Italy of the Renaissance. The food, Cherry realized, was not nearly so good as that she could get at the Ritz, but to Alicia Mohun it was nectar and ambrosia. The service was as perfect as three men could make it, two in livery and a third, the shadow who had placed the chairs, in black. Now definitely determined to be upon her good behavior, Cherry talked gayly enough with her hostess and host, submitting even to Mrs. Chichester's questioning with a demureness which was very charming. It was in Cherry's head that, if all the others were to play a game, why shouldn't she? During that luncheon butter wouldn't have melted in her mouth. But her reward came across the *épergne* in grateful glances from her mother, who knew that when Cherry chose to make them so, her manners could be quite top-form.

After luncheon they saw the pictures in the ballroom gallery, one of the first, as Mrs. Chichester explained, that had been built in New York. And then, the old lady took Cherry back into the drawing-room and bade

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her sit beside her while she questioned. She was not such a terrifying old lady after all when one got behind the crust of her reserve. Cherry even felt a little sorry for her, with her mountains of flesh, her asthmatic stateliness and her game leg, inured for the remainder of her pampered existence in this sumptuous tomb, which from the moment she had entered it had gotten on Cherry's nerves.

Altogether it may be said that Cherry made an excellent impression upon the great lady, though she had suffered something in the accomplishment. For the Mohun ladies in their machine were hardly beyond the shadow of the great *porte cochère* when Cherry threw open the windows of the car and fell back in the cushions.

"Gee whiz! Muzzy. Give me air!" she gasped.

"Cherry?"

"I'm suffocated with the odors of sanctity. Why don't they open the windows and let some of the royal purple out into the blue sky?"

"Cherry, you're incorrigible!"

Her mother's favorite invective, but now it found her daughter calmly lighting a cigarette without even drawing a curtain.

"Say, Muzzy, I'd *perish* in a place like that. Don't you feel sorry for the poor old thing—! I wonder if she has a cork leg. And the chins get bigger as they go down—"

"My dear child, you mustn't be so critical. Mrs. Chichester was hospitality itself, and I think she ad-

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mired you very much. I was *so* afraid you'd ask for a cigarette."

"I wanted to, Muzzy. But you *did* look so pathetic—I hadn't the heart. But five minutes more and I'd have *exploded!*"

Alicia Mohun sighed. "I wish you would look upon the larger aspects of life with more soberness," she said.

"I will when I have to, darling," said Cherry, patting her mother's gloved hands playfully. "But I did behave nicely, didn't I?"

"Yes, my dear. Very nicely."

"I tried very hard. But it's used me up. Phew! I feel like 'going on the loose.'"

"Please, Cherry."

"Oh, just a drive with Bruce."

"I wish you wouldn't."

"I've promised."

"I can't see how you can go to a luncheon in a house like that and then go out with a person like this Mr. Cowan—a nobody—a——"

"Sh—Muzzy. You mustn't call Bruce names."

"Cherry! When will you learn reason?" she gasped.

Cherry looked straight before her, frowning.

"I've made a martyr of myself to please you. Now you mustn't object to my doing something to please myself."

Alicia Mohun did not reply. Already they had had one disagreement upon the subject of Mr. Cowan and the mother had emerged from the conflict second-best.

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Cherry had picked a page from Alicia Mohun's own book. For it was Cherry who had rounded out the discussion by first going out at the door. Mrs. Mohun knew that coercion was not the means to be used successfully with her daughter, so she said nothing more.

They reached the house in silence and Cherry flew before her up the stairs and in a moment, from her own room, she heard Cherry 'phoning to the odious Cowan.

With a sigh Alicia Mohun took off her gloves and hat, laid aside her coat, and sank into a chair by the fireplace, as she reflected upon this latest and greatest social triumph of her career.

Of course the purpose of the luncheon had been perfectly understood, except perhaps by Cherry herself, who had merely accepted the invitation because her mother had insisted upon her doing so. And there was not the slightest doubt that Mrs. Chichester had given her approval of Cherry. She had shown it in the delicate farewell pat of her jeweled hand and the gracious smile that she had bestowed upon Alicia, a confiding smile, almost familiar, as though to say, "Cherry is lovely, I am sure that she will grace my name. We understand each other. Let us keep this secret."

Gone, the consequential air with which she had greeted them. Alicia felt her fortunes under the majestic shadow of the great lady's patronage and protection. The match was already a thing accomplished. All that remained was to bring Cherry to the point of agreeing with her.

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The smile faded at Alicia Mohun's lips and a tiny shadow appeared at her brows, fled before the recurrence of the smile and then definitely remained. Cherry would have to be reckoned with and at once. Of course she was almost too young to understand what a marriage with John Chichester would mean to her. Child of nature, she gave thought only to the instincts of youth for joy and pleasure. Mrs. Chichester meant nothing of this to her. It was perhaps going to be more difficult than her mother had supposed, to educate Cherry to the point of appreciating all the benefits that a future such as Alicia planned could have in store. But the time had come for a definite change in Cherry's point of view with regard to the great issues of life. She would have to learn about her prospects and of her obligations to her family.

The frown on Alicia Mohun's brows deepened, though she rubbed it away again and again, with her fingers. She didn't like Cherry's friendship with this Bruce Cowan, who was, as far as she could learn, a person of no importance. But Cherry could be obstinate when she chose. How dull of her! And at such a time! It was a part of the democratizing influence of the War which had worked and was still working incalculable harm. Cherry had even gotten 'Genie and some of the other girls to take Cowan up—"just because he had looked so well in uniform." The friendship was rather maddening in a way, especially as it could have no real importance.

But now that Cherry's plans for the afternoon were

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made, her mother dared not bring the matter to an issue. Another day would be better for that—to-morrow perhaps. And so dissembling, her pretty voice called softly to Cherry as she went down the stairs for her drive.

"Are you quite warm, darling? You know, there's the Carrington's dinner dance to-night. The dinner's at eight. Be sure to be home in time to dress."

"All right, Muzzy—good-by." Cherry was down the stairs, skipping gayly, and out at the door.

Dear child! No real harm in her of course—nor in this curious friendship which had assumed an unpleasant if only momentary significance in the light of the greater glory of her opportunities. Alicia Mohun closed and locked the outer doors of her rooms and, slipping on a pink silk *peignoir*, sat before her three-angle mirror and, taking several round boxes of salve from a drawer of her dressing table, began that intricate process of facial regeneration to which she turned whenever she had a doubt or a difficulty.

But the tiny wrinkle which had made its appearance between her eyebrows refused to be diminished. She smiled at it, pleaded with it, grimaced gently, but all to no effect. The wrinkle remained. Its imperviousness to blandishment annoyed and then startled her. She would have to stop taking the little difficulties of life so seriously. The Port of Dreams was not so far distant now. She would succeed. She always had succeeded in every ambition, why not in this, the greatest ambition of them all? She was smiling again

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at her image which was still, as she was forced to admit even to herself, very lovely. And the little democrat of a wrinkle suddenly flattered her by its absence.

The ritual before the mirror lasted an hour and then she bathed and slept.

It was dark when she awoke. Through the partly opened window she was aware of street sounds, the rattle of a taxi, its loose chains playing a sort of rag-time down the street; the roar of the distant L, newsboys calling. Hastily she tried to make out what it was that they called, but the gibberish was unintelligible and she dropped off to sleep again, to be awakened by the knock of her maid on the door telling her that it was time to dress for dinner. The maid entered, switching on the lights and Mrs. Mohun arose from her couch, blinking sleepily at the pink enameled clock.

"Has Miss Cherry come in?" she asked.

"No, Madam."

"It's getting late. There is hardly time to dress even now."

Mrs. Mohun dressed slowly—she had no engagement for the evening—with anxious glances at the clock. It was already nearly half past seven and the Carrington's dinner was at eight. Cherry frequently came home late and dressed in a rush, but had never committed the unpardonable sin of cutting a dinner engagement. Bruce Cowan! Alicia, gazing in her cheval glass, saw the tiny wrinkle at her brows suddenly appear, deeper, more portentous, than ever. Cherry



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was with Bruce Cowan and quite oblivious of the passage of time. Perhaps. . . .

"One moment, Lillie," she said suddenly to her maid, "I must 'phone."

In succession she got the houses of Cherry's intimates, the Macklins, 'Genie Armitage, the Townes, but none of them had seen Cherry or heard from her.

Slowly Mrs. Mohun turned away, trying to conceal her anxiety, which, as the hands of the clock indicated ten minutes to eight, became very real indeed. Cherry was thoughtless, frivolous, gay, but she had always shown a sense of obligation in her social engagements. As eight o'clock struck Mrs. Mohun began to fear that an accident had happened—always a possibility when one considered the speed at which Cherry drove. But surely some one would have 'phoned. . . .

As her own dinner was announced, Alicia Mohun went down and sat at the table alone. She never expected her husband until she saw him, so his absence was not unusual, and Bob, of course, was never to be depended upon. She went through the formality of pretending to eat, while she listened for the sound of Cherry's voice in the hall, but at last, having no appetite, she left the table and went upstairs, after telling the butler that when Miss Cherry came in she was to go at once to her mother's room.

All the joy of her triumph of the afternoon was gone. She was very much disturbed, for, with the recollection of Cherry's words and the manner in which she had said them, Alicia Mohun no longer thought of

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the possibility of an accident. Cherry was staying from home purposely to spend evening as well as afternoon with the man her mother so much disliked. It was incredible, and yet what else could her mother believe? Further telephoning revealed nothing—even to the Carringtons, whose house she called up with a white lie, announcing her daughter's sudden indisposition.

There was nothing for it but to wait, so she got into a dressing gown, turned on her table-light and picked up a magazine. But she could not concentrate her thoughts upon the printed page, and lay most of the time, listening intently, crossing a dozen times to the head of the stairway at fancied sounds. She was angry, hurt, and a little startled too at the thought of the possible lengths to which her daughter's friendship with Bruce Cowan might have gone, for this would make the consummation of her mother's plan extremely difficult.

It was curious, too, that she had not heard from her husband, for when he did not come home, he usually sent word where he was to be. She would have liked to talk with him to-night about Cherry—and about Bob, too. For she had heard from Cherry that Bob was drinking more than was good for him. Alicia remembered rather clearly now conversations with her husband when she had deprecated the idea that anything was wrong with either of the children. She was ready to-night to admit that perhaps she had been mistaken, a large concession indeed from one of Alicia

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Mohun's convictions. Why didn't Jim come home? Never that she could remember in recent years had she so much wanted to talk with him.

The silence of the house oppressed her and yet there was nothing to do but wait. She resented the gayety of the note of the pink enameled clock which daintily struck the hours in succession ten—eleven—twelve. But she had dismissed her maid and resolutely remained awake with the determination not to undress or go to bed until Cherry returned. Cherry should reckon with her for this. The girl must be severely talked with, disciplined, if necessary, by her father. Too much depended. . . . Exhausted with her thoughts Alicia Mohun dropped off to sleep.

She did not know at what hour she awoke, but she started upright aware of some one in the room beside her. All the lights were ablaze and she saw that it was her son.

"Bob!" she gasped. "How you frightened me!"

"Did I, Muzzy? Sorry."

She was wide-awake in a moment, her delicate nostrils aware of his nearness.

"Bob!" she gasped again as she realized.

"Aw'fly sorry woke you, Muzzy. Saw lightsh, came in. Fact is Muzzy, I've got to have some money."

She was staring at him but he passed her and threw himself into a chair. Bob had always respected the sanctity of her own room too much to show himself before her in this condition.

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"Money, Bob?" she said with a quiet note of repro-  
bation.

"Oh, I s'pose you think I'm drunk. Well, I'm not. I'm all right—qui' a'right. Just lil' party, Muzzy. Need a hundred or so—'vance on 'lowance."

"Bob! You're drunk. Please go out—at once."

"Oh, I say, Muzzy. Not fair. Say'm drunk when 'm sober. Sober's judge, honest. Wouldn't come here *this* room drunk. Now would I, Muzzy? Too much respec'. Just need a hundred or so—lil' party—nice people. Very nice peep'. Never go with anybody but nicesh peep'. Always do what'm told. Never go with anybody but nicesh peep'."

Alicia Mohun was looking at him in dismay and disgust, all the faculties which she usually employed in avoiding the unpleasant, in eliminating the disagreeable, at a loss in this situation which was new to her. This was not her son Bob who sprawled in her pretty chair, but a strange young man whom she had never seen before. It was with a shock that had in it some of the elements of retribution that she awoke to the fact that she had seen very little of him lately—never at breakfast which she took upstairs, never at luncheon because she usually took luncheon elsewhere or else had guests at home—and only occasionally at dinner when he was frequently morose or uncommunicative—or when he came to beg, like this, for money.

"Bob!" she gasped in a voice that seemed little like her own, "leave my room."

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"Why, Muzzy—"

"I—I have no money to give you. Go, please—"

"Why—wh—what have I done?" asked the boy straightening a little in his chair. "Jus' a drink or two, Muzzy. No reason to turn 'gains' a fellow like that."

"I don't wish to talk with you—in this condition—" She walked to the door and pointed outside.

"Jus' a hundred, Muzzy, and I'll go."

He had gotten to his feet and was already fumbling at the shopping bag which she kept hanging from the swivel of her cheval glass.

"Bob, I forbid you." She crossed toward him but halted, shrinking from the contact. "Don't touch it! —Do you hear?"

Louder than she had ever raised her voice before, it startled the boy as much as it did herself, for he turned, the roll of bank notes in his hand, and looked at her in stupid amazement.

"Muzzy! You're angry—"

"You shan't take it. You shan't," she cried again, barring the way with her white arms.

Meanwhile, outside the house in the dark a man was fumbling with his latchkey. He opened the door and entered at last, closing it noiselessly behind him. Then he straightened and looked about him like one who has come into the wrong house by mistake. For a moment he stood stock-still, listening; then breathing heavily he took off his hat and overcoat and laid them

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very carefully on a chair near by. His high forehead shone pale under the hall-light and a wisp of moist hair streaked downward across it to his brows. He walked to the foot of the stairway where he looked up toward the light on the upper landing, listening again. He might have been a burglar for all the sound he made, but his motions were those of one bewildered, and the deep shadows under his brows gave the stare from his eyes a singular intensity. He stood leaning upon the balustrade for a moment, his head bent, and then with an air of making a decision staggered up the stairs, gripping the baluster-rail as he rose. Midway up the flight he paused, for a sound of voices came from Alicia Mohun's dressing room and at the top landing a listening servant fled before him. His wife's voice and Bob's. It took all of his courage to walk the few steps that remained to the open door, but he stood, in a moment, swaying on the threshold.

Wife and son saw him at the same instant, both too intent upon their controversy to note details of his appearance.

"Jim!" the woman appealed with a wild gesture toward their son, "forbid him to take it."

"Oh, I say, Dad—jus' a lil' 'vance against——"

"He's taking my money—against my will—" she broke in. "He's drunk—beastly. Make him go, please."

Her husband had stumbled forward into the room and leaned heavily on a chair.

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"Money!" he muttered stupidly. "Money!" And then made a sound in his throat like laughter.

"I won't give it to him. I won't." She started backward, staring, as her look passed to her husband, lingering, distended in horror at his appearance. "Why, Jim—wh—what is it? What's the matter?"

"There's no more money. Nothing!" he whispered hoarsely.

"Jim! I—I don't understand. What do you mean?"

"There's no more money—for Bob—for any of us." His color was ghastly as his pale glance flickered into hers a moment and then turned away. He bent his head as though for her reproaches and fell, rather than sank, into a chair, burying his face in his hands. She ran to him, her white hands like moths fluttering.

"I—I don't understand. Tell me. Tell me——"

"I've failed. Mohun and Company have failed," he groaned.

She straightened above him, staring at the bank notes upon the rug which had dropped from Bob's nerveless hand, her slender fingers, as though from force of habit, passing over her white brow into the burnished hair.

"Why, what is it you're saying, Jim?" she asked faintly.

He raised his head until his look met hers.

"I've spoken the truth," he said with a painful effort. "The truth. We're ruined—all of us. Every-

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thing's gone—this house—everything. Do you understand?"

Until she looked again into the haggard eyes which seemed to be staring unseeing, beyond her, she could not believe. Then she swayed slightly, catching at the mantel-shelf. All her world, the very floor under her feet, seemed to be falling away.

"Tell me—tell me—" she heard herself saying.

"Where's Cherry?" muttered Mohun thickly. "Cherry—Cher—"

He started up, one hand groping. "Why—" he gasped, "I can't—can't—"

In horror Alicia stared. "Wh—what is it, Jim?—your face—?"

With a last effort Mohun strove to keep erect. Then he toppled sideways upon his chair, rolling heavily to the floor, where, after a futile effort of one arm, he lay motionless.

The rush of calamity had been so swift that even now Alicia Mohun stood helpless with fright. But she dropped at last to her knees beside him, touching his cold hands and calling his name, looking with terror at his twisted face, while Bob, his brain clearing, rushed to the telephone.



## CHAPTER IX

### A JOY RIDE

**I**F the girl of to-day is properly considered in relation to her associations by the indulgent recorder of social history he will find her more their victim than their agent. A life after all is merely the sum of one's collective impressions and when custom conspires to bring into the few short years of adolescence the excitations of a whole lifetime—the wonder is not that the conduct of the girl of to-day is not exemplary but that she has any sense of moral obligation whatever.

It is doubtful whether Cherry Mohun (or indeed any other girl of her set) ever gave a thought in any such terms to the provocations which surrounded her. Indeed it is extremely doubtful whether she thought at all about the moral aspect of her indulgences. She took life as she found it, like a humming-bird in a garden, sipping as she pleased from flower to flower, radiant in the sunshine of her own delights. And as with the humming bird, her responsibility ended with the gratification of her appetites. It was a wonderful garden full of strange and rather gorgeous flowers, some of which she found unpleasant to the taste. These she sipped not, contenting herself to

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pass them by with a skeptical flirt of wing for those of a quieter color and a lesser odor.

One couldn't say that Cherry was unmoral any more than one could say that a humming bird was unmoral. If she was unmoral, it was as Dr. Johnson's dog was an infidel, in that "he had never thought upon the subject." Cherry had never thought with a great deal of seriousness about anything and those brief moments of self-communion which David Sangree had noted with approval seemed merely the outcroppings of a rich vein of valuable metal that lay far beneath the surface and which remained to be discovered even to Cherry herself. Alicia Mohun had never made a practice of seeking the consolations of religion, for she guessed and rightly, that to a person of her definite ambitions, religion could have nothing to offer her. But, dressed in her best with Cherry by her side, she always went to church once a year on Easter Sunday—a fashionable Episcopal church, where there were candles and vestments pleasant to the eye. Cherry had never been confirmed, and Alicia Mohun had never ceased to regret her lukewarmness in the matter, for the temporary effect would have been beneficial and the blessing of a Bishop was, of course, not to be despised. Now, it seemed, Cherry was quite indifferent to the attractions of the Episcopal church or of any other. She was a fine young pagan, in fact, with the mere glimmerings of a conscience, tolerably respectful of the opinions of others, so long as they did not obtrude upon her own, and intensely loyal

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in the few beliefs in externals which she had imbibed from the world. Could she have been born at the proper time and caught young enough she would have made a splendid Druid priestess or, a passionate Christian martyr, would ever have combated the wild beast sent out to devour her.

It was this kind of devotion to her friendships which made her the center of the group in which she moved, and she was quick to resent a slight or an insult to any one that she liked. She liked Bruce Cowan—admired him intensely. He had been a “peach” to her in Paris and so when, after the War he came to New York to live, she tried to make her friends swallow him horns, hoofs and tail. It was not an easy task because the older crowd was trying to begin to be snobbish again. What did it matter where Bruce Cowan came from so long as he had evening clothes and behaved himself? She had had to give ‘Genie and one or two of the others a talking-to and ‘Genie had at last agreed to ask him to her dance.

But Cherry still had a feeling that her missionary work was not quite successful and that there were those even in her own set who were not prepared to accept her friend without reservations. And so, since Cherry could not meet him as often as she liked in people’s houses she met him elsewhere. That was her way of showing her resentment to those who ignored him—against her mother even, whose antagonism was quite the most difficult to endure. . . . Just because he was

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a salesman in the "Magnificent Motors Company" and not a Bartou, a Chichester or a Galbraith!

Muzzy's social ambition was getting just a little on Cherry's nerves. Hadn't she gone against her will to luncheon with "Demi-John" and the old Chichester Dodo, submitted to a lot of impertinent questions from the old lady about her tastes, her talents, her health and a number of other things that were nobody's business but her own? Hadn't she been stifled with stodgy magnificence and stuffed with Victorian maxims? Hadn't she yielded to Muzzy's blandishments and made a martyr of herself during the loveliest hours of a sunny winter afternoon? And all because Muzzy wanted her to marry John Chichester. Well, she wouldn't marry him. She wasn't going to open a home for decayed gentlemen of middle age who wanted to settle down. Besides she didn't like the shape of his nose, or the wisp of mustache or the little abrupt way he had of pulling at it. . . . Oh, a thousand things! Imagine being Mrs. Demi-John! Impossible!

She ran down the steps joyfully and into her roadster which had been brought around from the garage. She felt like one who has just been liberated from a prison, taking deep breaths of the keen air that was full of frosty sunshine. "On the loose!" She grinned as she thought of the effect of the phrase on poor Muzzy as she emerged from that atmosphere of social sanctification.

Muzzy had come down the steps of the great house

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with much the air of one who has paid a visit to a shrine said to possess miraculous healing powers. She had worn on her face an expression of complete beatification and Cherry had told her that she was "going on the loose." Tears of merriment came to Cherry's eyes in the brisk wind. The trouble with Muzzy was that she had no sense of humor . . . none at all . . . never had had. . . . Poor dear! What a pity! She had lost such a lot out of life.

Cherry drove westward through the Park, picked up Bruce Cowan at the office of the "Magnificent Motors Company," and then made for the Speedway and the country which lay beyond. Distance meant nothing to Cherry except as ground which was to be covered in a given time, and, the exactions of the traffic policemen having been grudgingly met, in a short while they were bowling along in the general direction of Albany with no particular object in view except to find as many fine straight stretches of road as possible and to pass over them with the greatest speed consistent with the bare preserving of life and limb.

Among other reasons, Cherry liked Bruce Cowan because he knew more about the diseases of motors than any one that she had ever met. She liked to talk about motors and their troubles, and the relative merits of different makes of cars. These were the chief topics of discussion among the young people that she knew unless they were talking about one another and Bruce Cowan more than others spoke with the voice of authority. Her roadster was a "Magnificent"

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which her companion had sold her, and it had lived up beautifully to its expensive reputation. She was sure that she had made no mistake in it or in him, for in a way Bruce was quite as magnificent as the car he sold—big, masterful, with an air of general proficiency which left very little to be desired. It was true that he was not quite so splendid in mufti as he had been in uniform—but then his eyes were lovely and his chin was quite the finest that she had seen—a strong, blue chin shaped like the one on the masque of Antinous which she had once drawn from at boarding school. And then—well, masculine strength had always appealed to her.

They had spun off the last five miles of a lonely road in something less than four minutes and Cherry shut off the power and sank back into the low seat with a sigh of gratification.

“That was great—great—”

“She’s a lady, isn’t she?” he muttered triumphantly. “Handmade, every inch. Not even warm. If you could buy good gasoline she’d jump the river—Fact.”

“I love it. Glad I didn’t get the ‘K. K.’” she said.

“Oh, say, Cherry, you couldn’t have bought the ‘K. K.’ with me selling the ‘Magnificent,’ even if it wasn’t all I claimed for it.”

“I like *that*! Do you think I’d have bought it just because of *you*?”

“Sure thing,” said Cowan. “You like me enough to have done that for me, don’t you?”

## *THE HOUSE OF MOHUN*

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"Now—! You needn't get so pleased with yourself all of a sudden, Bruce Cowan."

"Love me—love my dog. You love the car, you've got to love me too."

"That doesn't follow," she said with a laugh.

"It ought to. It will." The road was quite deserted. He bent over her and laid his hand over hers on the wheel. "Say, Cherry. Tell me, you'll marry me, won't you?"

"Look out!" Cherry's toe pressed the accelerator and the car lurched violently forward. He bore himself in patience until she reduced her speed and then with a laugh,

"You little devil! What did you do that for?" he said.

"Embarrassment," she said coolly.

"H—m. I'm not going to let you off so easily."

"Aren't you? What are you going to do?"

"This." And he turned off the switch, holding her hands. "Now answer me!"

"Cave-man stuff—" she muttered.

"Yes, if you like." And he kissed her.

"Let go my hands," she gasped, stifled.

The car had come to a stop, slowly, in the ditch.

"No," he said, and then more quietly, "Damn it, Cherry. You've got to listen. I love you. You ought to know it by now. I'm keen for you. Honest I am. And you wouldn't want to come out with me if you didn't like me a lot. Tell me you'll marry me."

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"I don't like to be pawed, Bruce," she said, struggling.

"Please! Answer me."

"Let me go."

She struggled and he released her, content to await his time. For a moment she preened herself, taking off one gauntlet—and rubbing her wrist. The gauntlet she negligently dropped over the side of the car to the ground.

"I'd never marry a cave man." She flashed at him.

"I didn't mean to be rough," he said sullenly.

"But you were. You've bruised my wrist."

"I'm sorry." He tried to catch it to his lips but she jerked away.

"I don't like to be kissed. When I decide to be I'll tell you so."

"Cherry! Don't be cruel."

She made a motion of searching for her gauntlet and then peering over the side of the car gave a slight sound of surprise.

"My glove, Bruce," she said calmly. "I've dropped it."

Completely disarmed by the tone of her voice and wishing to placate her, he got out awkwardly. Cherry made some swift motions. He was just passing around the rear of the car when its polished surface slipped deftly out from under his grasping fingers, while the roar of the exhaust left him gasping in a blue cloud of vapor. Cherry and the car were thirty yards



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away before he realized the possibilities of the situation. Then she came to a stop and grinned at him with diabolical sweetness.

"Cave man!" she taunted.

"He bent over and picked up the glove, deliberating.

"Cave man!" she repeated, more sweetly.

"Oh say, Cherry," he began, walking toward her, still keeping his dignity. But Cherry moved slowly on at the distance which she considered a proper one.

"Come on, Bruce," she cried.

He walked faster. Cherry drove more rapidly.

He stopped, so did Cherry. It was an enjoyable game for her, a most exasperating one for him.

"It's a long walk to Poughkeepsie, but you can make it by ten o'clock if you hurry. I'll pace you, Bruce."

"You *will*—!" he cried and made a furious dash toward her covering the thirty yards in four seconds flat. But Cherry had moved further up the road and the sound of her laughter was disconcerting.

"You said this car 'picked up' very fast. It *does* Bruce—adorably. But it doesn't pick *you* up."

"Oh, quit kidding, Cherry, won't you?"

"I'm not kidding. You can see for yourself—" And she sent another cloud of dust in his direction.

He looked as crestfallen as she hoped him to be.

"Cherry," he called, "let me get in, won't you?"

"No, I won't. Walk! or run if you like."

"I'm sorry. I won't do it again."

"I know you won't. Meanwhile—" and she waved a hand—"I've got a dinner engagement."

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Putting on speed she left him standing, sheepish, in the middle of the road.

She had no intention of deserting him, but it amused her to drive away and leave him to his six feet one of injured dignity. Besides it would give him time to cool off. Bruce Cowan was one of the few men whose very presence provided her with a sense of subdued excitement. It was this which attracted her—his bulk, his square chin and the mystery that lay behind a character which was less familiar to her than those of the boys whom she had always known. Bruce Cowan was a man, full-grown, and though his heavy voice still smacked of the barrack-room, she thought no less of him because of that. She liked to tempt the furies that lay chained in his eyes, for he was really magnificent when he was angry. He appealed to something primitive in her, that must have been her heritage from a previous incarnation.

But it was ridiculous how easily she had vanquished him. She grinned complacently at the occupants of a passing "flivver," drove a few miles further and then turned the car and waited, thinking.

Why was it that peril always fascinated her? The peril of Dicky Wilberforce and his flying. Danger. Excitement. Always to go one step further without coming a cropper. Bruce Cowan had sworn a dozen times that he loved her but he had never kissed her before. His kiss had only left her cold, cunning and resentful. She wanted him to be in love with her of course, more even than she had wanted Dicky or

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Harold or Ted—because he was forbidden. It was rather gorgeous to be loved by a cave man. The sense of her power fascinated her, but she didn't in the least wish to be in love with him. She liked the constant danger of his mauling her but she would have died rather than let him do it. To tame him—to keep him tamed—that was a game worth playing which made the small talk of the Carrington's dinner table seem a most trivial amusement.

A feather of snow came out of the dusk and moistened her cheek recalling her to a sense of time and obligation. Twenty minutes had passed since she had left him. So she drove back rapidly, spearing the dusk with her searchlight, which at last picked out Bruce Cowan sitting on a fence rail, smoking a cigarette. She stopped. "Well," she asked calmly, "are you chastened?"

He climbed down deliberately.

"No," he muttered, "just chilly."

"Oh, then perhaps I'd better drive off again."

"Just as you please," he said with a shrug.

She stared at him in silence for a moment, her fingers on the clutch, her toe poised above the accelerator. Frankly, though she knew that he had won, she rather admired his attitude, which was true to form—

"Oh, get in," she said carelessly, "we can't be stopping here all night."

"Thanks," he said, throwing his cigarette away and climbing in.

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"But just keep to your own side of the car, will you?" she insisted.

"Oh, all right," he laughed.

"I wasn't going to leave you anyway. But I might have."

"But you didn't." And then, "I can get out now and walk, if you want me to."

"No," she said slowly. "But please don't be silly any more."

"Silly! When I love you—!"

"I wish you'd talk about the weather, please. It's snowing."

He shrugged, and laughed. "Yes, I noticed it," he said and then settled slowly down, making no reply.

"Where are we now—really?" she asked.

"Somewhere in Putnam County I guess," he said vaguely.

"And I've a dinner at eight."

"It's half past six now. You could never make it."

"I've got to."

"H—m. Still angry?"

She shrugged.

"Are you?"

"No. Yes."

"Which?"

"No. It's not worth being angry about."

"Oh, I'm glad to hear you say that. It isn't really. But you don't have to go back. If you're not angry you can prove it."

"How?"

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"By taking dinner with me somewhere out here and going back later."

"Oh, I couldn't," she gasped, rather attracted by the thought nevertheless.

"There you go," he muttered. "Always trying to get away from me."

"I'm not. But a dinner—?"

"With a lot of Dodos. Who cares? Don't you think you owe me something after the way you've treated me? I thought you cared for me a little."

"I do. But—"

"How do you show it? By trying to make me ridiculous. I'm not the kind to stand for that sort of thing, like your little Willies of the ballroom, your blue-blooded little 'toddlers' from upper Fifth Avenue. You said you liked me because I was different from the rest, because I was a full-grown man. Why, you won't even let me tell you I love you any more."

"I don't mind your telling me, Bruce. But I don't want you to act it."

"Well, I'm not a stone image. But I'll promise to behave if you'll do what I ask you to." He straightened in his seat. "Let's see how much you care. Come, now. We'll drive down to Peekskill and have dinner. Then a dance at the Red Horse afterwards. It's a road house near Tarrytown. Jazz. Niggers. You'll like it. It's different—"

"Oh, Bruce, I oughtn't to."

But the idea caught in her mind and remained there, meshed in the chaos of half-educated impulses. It was

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the unusual which always attracted her and too—there was Bruce, humbled now, more threatening even in his humility.

“You oughtn’t to ask me, Bruce.”

“Why not? I’ve got some rights, haven’t I?”

“No, none.” She said frowning. And then with a quick gasp, “But I’ll go with you.”

“You will,” he cried delighted. “Oh, say, you’re a good little sport after all.”

They had come to a crossroad. Cherry always liked crossroads. They always seemed significant.

“Which way, Bruce?” she asked.

“Right. We’ll make the river, somewhere.”

By day The Red Horse Tavern nestling modestly in its clean hills above the river bore the chaste exterior of a colonial dwelling. But its appearance from the front was deceptive, for at the rear of the house a large building had been added, to conform to the increasing patronage of its guests, which were many by day, many more by night. For the dance hall had gained a popularity among persons of a certain class, both in city and country, and for more than a year the Inn had enjoyed a reputation which other places of amusement more elaborate and expensive might have envied. Here, there was immunity of a sort from the restrictions of the Volstead Act, though whether by collusion or neglect no one seemed to care.

The proprietor, smug with prosperity, and flatulent with self-assertion, had every air of commanding a situation which, though injurious to others of his trade,

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had no terrors for himself. But his patrons were not of those who cared greatly for the consequences of their temerity—the hoydens of the towns along the railroad with their swains—“get-rich-quick” small fry with their wives—or other men’s—from the city, pale, dark Jews escorting highly tinted blondes, professional dancers from the Rialto, and staid burghers (with a twinkle in the eye) from Harlem or the Bronx.

It was long after eleven o’clock when Bruce Cowan and Cherry drove into the parking place beside the Inn, having been held up by a blow-out. They had dined quite comfortably at a place he knew in Peekskill, for Bruce by some magic had produced cocktails in tea-cups, one of which Cherry had demurely sipped.

They were very bad cocktails but they served to diminish the sullenness of her companion, who still resented the indignity Cherry had put upon him. But she had brought him around her finger deftly at last and scarcely knowing how she had done it, Bruce Cowan found himself ready to believe that he was no less adorable than ever.

The sound of the jazz at the Red Horse got into Cherry’s feet before she had reached the porch, for this, as she realized at once, was the real thing—no modern hotel orchestra with its sophisticated “rag,” but the barbaric jazz itself straight from the Jungle. The piano and violin played by quick, apish hands were more the vehicle of cadence than tune and the real meaning of the music was in the banjos and the drums, lineal descendants of gourds and tom-toms.

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She was a little dismayed at the appearance of the crowd, but intensely curious about it all, like a fox terrier scenting mischief.

Bruce Cowan's fingers were at her elbow.

"They're not our sort, Bruce. Do you think I'd better?"

"H—m. You're not afraid, are you?" he laughed.

If there was any one phrase more provocative to Cherry to do and dare, it was the one her companion used. Afraid! She tilted her chin at him scornfully.

"Come on then," she muttered.

They danced. Cowan's strong arm reassured her and the witch-doctor at the drums had already put a spell upon her feet. Afraid! A turn around the floor and she had caught the infection of the place. She saw rough caricatures of people she knew, like the dances themselves, and the familiar tunes played so unfamiliarly. She couldn't help thinking that this was what her friends in New York wanted to do, yet did not dare.

And yet, except for the music, the people were like the people who danced in cabarets in New York. She even thought she saw faces that were familiar to her.

Bruce Cowan seemed to be enjoying himself immensely and in spite of a feeling of intense loyalty to her previous conceptions of him, she couldn't help feeling that he was more at home in this atmosphere than at the supper table at 'Genie Armitage's dance.

As she suddenly felt the oppression of the atmosphere she stopped dancing and sat for a moment on a chair



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near the door which had been left open to let in some of the clean night air. Bruce Cowan wanted to order something to drink but she refused.

It would have been different from taking cocktails before, or wine at, dinner at the house of a friend. To drink here would have seemed to make her definitely a part of these people, to make her a sharer in rather wanton rites. Indeed she was not quite certain that she ought not to be going home at once.

It was while debating the matter that she heard her companion's name spoken. A girl was standing in front of them. A tall girl, with hair a trifle too yellow, her lips and cheeks tinted with an over-elaboration which came of practice with grease paint. She bobbed her big hat pertly.

"Hello, Bruce," she said.

It was the first time that Cherry had ever seen Bruce Cowan at a disadvantage. He got up, frowning, "How are you, Maisie?" he muttered. And then awkwardly rose and talked in a lowered tone, completely excluding Cherry. Cherry looked in another direction, most uncomfortable, but she could not help hearing the parting shot of the tinted lady, over her shoulder, meant for Cherry's ear.

"Say—ain't that a scream! Bruce, you'd better take her back to the Ritz."

As Bruce Cowan turned Cherry rose.

"Get my wraps, please," she said.

Her companion met her glance for a moment uncertainly and then, without word in reply, turned and

## A JOY RIDE

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obeyed. Neither of them spoke until they were in the machine. Bruce, because he didn't know what to say, Cherry, because if she spoke she knew that she would say something she could regret.

"I didn't introduce you, Cherry. She isn't your sort."

"Why explain?" said Cherry.

"Nice girl, friend of a fellow at the office."

"Really."

"I just thought I'd tell you."

"Thanks."

Cherry drove with great care over the thin coating of sleet and snow. He spoke again of other things but she only answered in monosyllables.

"You aren't angry, are you?" he asked again.

"Why?"

"Oh, I just thought that *you* might have thought she was *my* friend."

"Who?" coolly.

"The blonde—Maisie."

"Well, *isn't* she?" The word "friend," as Bruce Cowan understood it, meant nothing to Cherry.

"Well—er—yes. In a way. But she's not your sort, you know."

"So you said."

"Don't be sore, Cherry. I hardly know the girl."

Cherry merely laughed.

She meant it to mean unutterable indifference and succeeded. Cherry's laugh could be very contemptuous at times. So at last he stopped speaking and sat in

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silence which, as the moments went on, grew set and sullen. Cherry, occupied with the wheel, seemed to have forgotten his existence. They were for the moment as far apart as the poles. But for all her placid exterior, the spark of conscience was flaming, burning her breast. It was that woman. She shouldn't have gone with Bruce Cowan. He shouldn't have taken her to a place like that. He should have known better. She seemed to have glimpses of shadowy recesses in his spirit.

And Bruce had kissed her. He would have to pay for that.

It was almost two o'clock when she drove into Seventy-eighth Street. With some amazement she noticed the lights in the upstairs windows of the Mohun house and the group of strange automobiles before the door. Hurriedly she bade her companion good night and took out her latchkey. But the door opened and a man hurried out.

"What is it?" she asked. "I'm Miss Mohun."

"Oh, Miss Mohun! I'm Dr. Heathcote—a consultant on this case. Your father—very ill—stroke of paralysis."

## CHAPTER X

### CONFESSION

**J**OHAN CHICHESTER'S revelations about Mohun's affairs—so intimately connected with his own—were a severe blow to David Sangree, and his subsequent conversations with George Lycett provided little comfort to either man. Both of them sold Textile Mills in small lots but the market continued to fall, and with the crash of the Mohun house all that remained of Sangree's respectable fortune was about fifteen thousand dollars in cash and a house far uptown which yielded him a small sum monthly. Sangree could not find it in his heart to blame his friend for the position in which he now found himself, for many others, sounder business men even than Lycett, had been caught in the decline in the Mohun shares, waiting as Sangree and Lycett had done for an upward turn in the market which never came.

Out of the confusion which had resulted from the disaster many rumors emerged, many of them dangerous to the reputations of some of the promoter's associates, but the newspapers, it seemed, were bent on giving due credit to James Mohun himself for having done all that he could do to stem the tide of misfortune, for having sacrificed his personal holdings in outside companies, notably the coppers, in order to protect the interests of those who had confided in him. But

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all without avail. The failure was one of the heaviest in a year of financial perplexities, and it was clear that the firm of Mohun and Company was completely ruined. The stroke of paralysis which had afflicted the unfortunate man seemed to add a touch of personal drama to a situation which was not without sordid details.

All of this David Sangree had read in the papers, after the occurrence, and in spite of the difficulties before him—the complete abruption of his personal plans for the future and the obvious and immediate necessity of finding some employment which would eke out a very slender income—he found himself thinking of the terrible situation which now confronted his young friend Cherry. For, unless Mrs. Mohun had other resources, it seemed very certain that the family was face to face with the desperate expedient of beginning life anew. In the course of the morning Sangree learned that the desperate illness of Mr. Mohun had prevented an assignment and that the creditors, one of the heaviest of which was the private banking house of John Chichester and Company, had already demanded the appointment of a receiver. This meant, he imagined, lengthy proceedings in which all of Mohun's holdings, or what remained of them in stocks, bonds or real estate, would be sold for the benefit of his creditors. John Chichester seemed to loom very large again at this moment.

Scarcely aware of what was in his own mind, David Sangree found himself out-of-doors on the second day after the failure walking rapidly northward. It was

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a little curious that this afternoon Cherry's difficulties should seem more important to him than his own. From the moment of their first meeting—when he had been aware of the paradox of a grudging admiration of her radiant personality—he had fallen, almost in spite of himself, into an attitude of avuncular benevolence toward her. At least this was the phrase which seemed best to indicate his state of feeling. But his benevolence, he was certain, was colored a little with pity too. For her very radiance and gayety were a mingling of ingenuousness and sophistication—an ingenuousness that was so little artificial, a sophistication that was so little wise. The drab colors of his own nature had assumed a livelier hue from his contacts with Cherry and he had taken care not to sully her brightness by any of the cynicism which had come out of his own experiences with a maddened world. The amusement that she always afforded him by the originality of her point of view (in contrast to his own) had become more and more delightful and the self-sufficiency, which had at first shocked his sensibilities, while no longer annoying, continually bewildered him by its consistency, and its accordance with all the other phases of her character. It pleased him to consider the drives with Cherry as excursions into a Golden Age which he had never seen. Her moments of silence and abstraction interested him too, for in them he saw beauties of spirit, usually quite obscured in the vehemence of her splendid gayety—gentle moods, pretty mental reservations as to her own folly, unexpected

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charities of heart and conscience—all like the warm spots of color which the painter sees blooming among the cool shadows of his composition.

And yet Sangree was sure that this interest in Cherry was Platonic, for the very security of their relationship rested upon the serenity of his own demeanor, which had been and still continued to be beyond praise. And even had he been a man addicted to sentimental moments—which he was not—Cherry's avoidance of all forms of coquetry with him and her expressions of gratitude over the fact that he at least never made love to her would have been enough to convince him that he might be ridiculous in any other but the avuncular capacity. All of which means, in brief, that they liked to be with each other for no reason in the world that either could discover except that each was different from any person that the other had met.

But the calamity which had fallen upon the house of Mohun made an immediate change in Sangree's point of view. The colorful companion of his rejuvenescence was now to be thrown, without a word of warning, upon her own resources, to face in a new guise a world that had treated her too kindly. What was to happen to Cherry? How was she equipped to face a battle for existence—if at the worst this should prove necessary? If beauty were an asset in the little world in which she had lived it might easily prove a liability in another world where favoritism is often the gauge of success. Her self-sufficiency, which had seemed so necessary a part of her character and independence, was

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less impressive now. He was very sorry for her, more sorry than he was for himself, and what he wanted most at this moment was to tell her so.

At the house in Seventy-eighth Street he sent up his card and in a moment Cherry came down. She stood for a moment poised in the doorway searching the dim shadows of the room for his familiar figure. More than the lights he had always liked the shadows in her face, and to-day they had a clearer definition. He thought her pallid and her eyes weary with watching and her voice, too, was pitched in a low key as though in recognition of some valid restraint. She came forward treading softly, her smile rather wistful, as she addressed him by his chosen title.

"Hello, Rameses!" she said quietly. "I'm so glad you came."

"Cherry! You poor child!"

He had not called her by her Christian name before, but to Sangree it seemed that he must always have done so.

She smiled a little as she took his extended hands, touched by the genuineness of his emotion.

"I thought you wouldn't mind my coming here to tell you how sorry I am about your father's misfortune—and yours."

"It's very sweet of you. Do sit down—here," and she indicated the divan in the corner. "It's all very sad of course. Father seems better, but it's going to be a long affair. God knows whether he'll ever be fit for anything again. They do give us hope, but then,—"



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she added, "they would. It's a thing they do." Her fingers in her lap clenched nervously at her handkerchief. "If you could only see him," she went on. "Poor dear!—twisted so pitifully. And he always seemed so strong—so vital." Her voice fell a note lower to conceal its trembling, as though she were ashamed of a weakness.

"There's nothing I can do? It would be a great privilege to be able to help—him or you."

"No. Nothing. Everything is being done. Every one has been very kind to Mother—to us all. But nobody seems to know much about the—the other thing—the business. It's almost as though they were afraid to talk about it, as though they wanted to hide from us how bad it is. Poor Dad! And he always worked so long and so hard while we—"

Her voice broke in a quick sobbing gasp and she couldn't go on.

"Poor Cherry!" he found himself muttering again as he laid his fingers over hers. But the touch of his hand seemed suddenly to let loose the forces of her own self-scorn.

"Don't pity me!" The words came bursting forth in a rush while she struggled for self-command. "Not me. I won't be pitied. I—who—"

Her voice broke again. "None of us needs to be pitied but him—none of us." She went on almost fiercely: "He tried so hard—suffered for months under this terrible strain while we—we were too selfish to notice him—when we might have helped."

## CONFESSION

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She halted for breath, both hands on her leaping breasts as she tried to calm herself.

"Don't, Cherry," he broke in, alarmed at the signs of hysteria. "How could you have known——?"

"I ought to have known if I—I hadn't been so wrapped in my own pursuits. Hadn't I seen him coming home at night dead beat, so tired and gray-looking? Why shouldn't I have known if I had loved him? I ought to have guessed. He didn't tell us his troubles. He wasn't that sort. Perhaps he didn't think we were worthy of knowing. I understand now what was in his mind. We weren't worthy. He knew that we weren't."

"Please, Cherry——"

"Let me talk. I've wanted to talk to some one. Let me tell you. I've got to speak to some one. I can't speak to *them*. I couldn't reproach *them* at such a time when I was more to blame even than they." She made a swift motion of protest as he began to speak. "No. Don't try to make things easier for me. You can't. I know what I ought to have done. I understood him better than. . . . I mean, I was close to him in many ways. There must have been times when he wanted me, and didn't tell me so because he thought that he might interfere with my pleasure. I ought to have known that too. And I didn't. I rarely saw him. There were times, I know, when I might have made it easier for him in a thousand ways—little ways that a man understands—big ways that might have saved him. And I—I didn't."

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Her voice quivered with pain.

"He wanted me. He called for me when he was stricken—after he had crawled home like some poor sick animal to die. Good God! He called for me and I wasn't there. I was—"

Strength, courage, self-command no longer served her, for she broke, all the reserve forces of her long hours of tireless watching yielding to the strain of sudden emotion. She bent forward beside him, her head in her arms upon the cushion in a passion of self-abasement. Except for a stifled sob or two she made no sound. But quick convulsive movements of her shoulders showed how deeply she was shaken. Her grief was the more painful to Sangree because he knew that she was not one who habitually wept.

Few men know what to do with a woman's tears and Sangree stared at her for a moment of embarrassment. And then with a quick impulse leaned forward and put his arm around her gently while he whispered at her ear,

"Don't, Cherry! Don't!"

But she didn't seem for the moment to be aware of him, though the heaving of the shoulders was gentler and her breathing was less difficult. To him the nape of her neck, under the bobbed hair, was very white and piteously vulnerable, so like a child's beneath this weight of her woe.

"Please don't cry, Cherry," he repeated, touching her arm with awkward fingers. "It can do you no good—nor any one. Please!"

## CONFESSION

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A murmur came from the sanctuary of her arms.

"Let me—let me. It's what I—what I've wanted to do—"

And so he sat inert a moment, watching her, only the tips of his fingers still moving timidly on her arm. After a while the spasm passed and she was silent and motionless though still bent away from him. He wanted to say something that would help her but no words came. The unexpected outburst of self-revelation had taken him by surprise. At first it had seemed to him that in the fullness of her heart she might have spoken thus to any one whose visit had been opportune. But in a moment he knew that he had been mistaken, for she was not one who would give freely, even under stress of emotion, of what was in her heart to those she did not value. . . . Less when under stress of emotion than at any other time. . . . Her pride. . . . It made him contented to know that alone with him she could throw her pride to the winds.

But he knew that until the storm had passed it was best that he should say nothing. And soon she sat up dabbling at her eyes with a handkerchief while Sangree watched her, waiting. He saw her take a timid glance at him, but what she saw in his eyes must have satisfied her, for the corner of her mouth flickered in a smile, as she raised her chin resolutely. "You didn't think, did you, Rameses," she said with a touch of her old humor, "that when you called you were in for thunder, lightning and a deluge? You think me a silly little fool?"

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"No. No. God knows I don't," he blurted out.

"I'm not the 'weepy' kind. You know that, don't you? I hate girls who cry. I can't remember when I've done it before. But I had to, somehow. It was your sympathy, I think."

"You know you have that. I just wanted to help if I could. . . ."

She laid her fingers gently over his, then quickly took them away.

"You have helped, I think. I don't know why I could let myself go—to you. Perhaps I thought you would understand."

"I do understand," he said slowly. "But I can't see you blaming yourself for something outside your power to help. That is merely preposterous."

"No," she said firmly, "I know. And I'll take the blame that's mine. I want your sympathy, I think, but not pity—not pity."

She brushed her wrist across her swollen eyes. All of Cherry's gestures were significant. This one had the unconscious grace of a child's.

"I must tell you the rest," she muttered. "Dad didn't like me driving at night with boys and dancing in public places. He told me so often, but I always laughed him off—and did as I pleased. Poor Dad! I didn't know that perhaps he might want me for himself once in a while. He always seemed so busy. . . . But I oughtn't to have gone against his wishes. It didn't matter so much about the people Dad knew

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and liked—like Dicky and Harold and—and you, Rameses. But I did go—often. With—with others.” She bent her head to her hands again and breathed deep, lowering her voice so that it was scarcely audible. “Why, the very night that father had his seizure I was out joy-riding, dining, dancing with Bruce Cowan—”

“Ah—” said Sangree, “Cowan.” And then calmly, “And what of that?”

“Oh, can’t you see what I mean?” she gasped. “Dancing—Jazz—not at the Ritz or the Biltmore—but at a road house—the Red Horse. It wasn’t what he would have liked. And while I was dancing he was suffering—wanting me—or somebody who really would understand him—to help him in the hour of his trouble—somebody of his own, to. . . .” She broke off with a despairing gesture, “Oh, not just this time only, but all the time—months and months—when I might have tried to understand something of the desperate condition of his mind—of his body, instead of spending money—buying anything I wanted—all of us did—clothes, jewelry, flowers, the fearful expenses of my coming out, the dances, suppers, the Opera. I didn’t think—none of us did—of him. It’s gone on for years—for years.” She bent forward, her chin in her hands, staring at the portrait of Alicia Mohun by a fashionable painter which faced her on the opposite wall. “Oh, God!” she half-whispered, “how I hate myself!”

Sangree couldn’t resist the thought that uncon-

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ssciously Cherry had included Alicia Mohun in the denunciation. For the portrait, singularly clever, had been painted by a man trained to catch the superficial beauties of his sitters and Alicia Mohun had possessed many of those. But Sangree had read through Cherry's confession her loyalty to her mother. They had all been to blame perhaps, but less than if the husband and father had taken his family into his confidence. And briefly, Sangree told her so. It was the least that he could do.

"Oh, you're trying to make things easier for me," she said. "You would. But I don't want things made easier. I want to look my life face to face. Oh, I've done some thinking since this awful thing happened. It's a pity I hadn't done so before." She turned toward him brightly. "You know, Rameses," she said with a short laugh. "You did tell me once that I had a mind to think with if I wanted to. Well, I've been thinking. And there's more thinking to come. For what the Devil is going to happen to us all, I don't know. I'm afraid things are pretty bad. You don't know anything about the business, do you?"

Sangree was silent for a moment. But to him there seemed no use in evading the issue. More even than Cherry, he knew that, short of a miracle to improve the condition of the business of the country, there was little chance of a restitution of James Mohun's affairs.

"First let me ask—has your mother any private income of her own?"

"No. None. All the money came from Dad."

## CONFESSION

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"That's too bad," he muttered. "I *do* know something about the business. You see," he explained with his slow smile, "almost all the money that I possessed was in 'Textile Mills.' "

"Everything! You?" she gasped. "I can't believe it."

"Oh, I shan't starve," he said with a laugh, "any more than you will. I'm only telling you, because you'd find it out later——"

"Oh, Dr. Sangree!" she cried again.

"My name is David," he put in with his whimsical smile. "Since misery loves company, it might as well enjoy the terms of familiarity."

"Of course—David. But I hadn't thought"—she said in a startled way—"that there were others. . . . Of course there must be. Oh, it's all too ghastly."

"But there's no use crying over it. Now is there?"

"No, I won't cry again."

"Then I'll tell you the truth as far as I know it. You see I've a great belief in your courage. I think you're going to need it. You mustn't count on anything from your father's business. Unless he has securities that no one knows about, there won't be anything."

"I suspected that," she said bravely, "because no one would speak——"

"But haven't you a lawyer—some one to advise your mother?"

"Mr. Pennington, yes. But she won't see him—or any one. She just paces the floor of her room up-



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stairs, or lies on the bed and moans. She's so helpless—it's all that I can do to fight the hopelessness of the whole situation."

"And Bob, your brother?"

"Oh, he will do anything he can, but he's so young, so untrained—like me."

Sangree was silent for a moment, frowning. "See here, Cherry," he said at last soberly, "I'm no lawyer. And you might gather from the result of my investments that I'm no business man. Perhaps I'm not even practical. But I thought I'd like you to know that I'd do anything in the world to try and help you. I want you to remember that. Will you?"

"Yes. Yes."

"Of course there will be others—many others to advise you. But whatever happens, I want to be sure that you'll let me keep my particular little niche in your regard. That you'll send for me when I can help, in any way—money even——"

"No, not money—but I do want you." She put her fingers over his for a moment. "I've shown you that, to-day. Haven't I?"

He put her fingers to his lips and rose.

"It has made me very happy," he said with an aspect of formality which he assumed to cover his awkwardness, "to think that you've thought me worthy of your confidences."

She smiled mistily.

"Good old Rameses," she said gently, "thanks for coming. I'll remember."

## *CONFESSION*

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"Anything," he repeated with a sober grin. "Even to riding wild horses."

She looked at him reproachfully, but he was still smiling as he went out at the door.

"Good-by, Cherry," he said cheerfully. "And buck up!"

"I will. Good-by, my friend."

After he had gone she stood for a long moment watching the doorway where he had been, a puzzled little wrinkle at her brows.

## CHAPTER XI

### BABES IN THE WOOD

**O**F course they were all perfectly helpless. The sudden wrecking of Alicia Mohun's Argosy, in a smiling sea so close to the Port of Desire, had amazed and bewildered her. Hoping against hope she listened with a greater dismay and terror at each telling, to the statements brought to her from down town, first by Bob Mohun and later by Robert Pennington, her husband's lawyer. The equities in the place at Oyster Bay, the newly purchased villa at Newport, and the house in which they were living were not nearly so large as had been supposed, were so small in fact that nothing could be realized from them at a forced sale; for James Mohun, playing for large stakes, had put all the money in his possession into the business, preferring to pay six per cent in interest for funds upon which he hoped to make twenty-five per cent.

The trustee of the bankruptcy proceedings, Geoffrey Towne, had already proceeded with passionless precision in compiling a list of Mohun's available assets, many of which had already been hypothecated in the effort to avert disaster.

But it was all very difficult for Alicia Mohun to un-

## BABES IN THE WOOD

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derstand. She had for so long accustomed herself to avoiding the rough contacts of the world that she still used every sophistry to defend herself from a truth that was unpleasant to her. Stretched upon her pink couch and dressed in her prettiest negligée she listened tearfully, but with a pose of fell determination, smelling bottle in hand, while the lawyer tried with skillful phrases to gild the pill so that it would be more palatable.

But Robert Pennington was a mere man, and Alicia's beauty had now gained the added charm of pathos which more than compensated for the shadows at her eyes and the tiny lines that she had not been able to obliterate. The message that he brought seemed almost a violation of that delicate and sensitive body.

"I regret, Mrs. Mohun," he finished, "that unless you have some income apart from that with which your husband has been providing you, and of which I am unaware, it would be very desirable—ahem—not to say necessary for you to change—ahem—almost at once—your whole mode of living."

"Oh, dear Mr. Pennington," she sighed, "is it as bad as that? I hoped at least that we could keep this house and the place at Oyster Bay. Couldn't we really, if we were *very* economical?"

"I—ahem—I'm afraid not, Mrs. Mohun. You see the houses, not belonging to you, not being in your name—even the one at Newport, I discover—they—ahem—naturally will go into the Receivership."

"But couldn't we ask their indulgence—at least until

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Mr. Mohun gets better? He is getting better, Mr. Pennington—the doctors all tell us so—”

“I’m—ah—afraid that that will be impossible,” said the lawyer.

“You don’t understand, Muzzy,” Cherry broke in with brutal frankness. “What Mr. Pennington is trying hard to tell you is that we’re ruined—*busted*—peniless. *Won’t* you understand?”

“Cherry dear! Please—”

“Isn’t that what you mean, Mr. Pennington?” Cherry asked of him directly.

“Well—ah—since Miss Mohun puts it so—I may say that—the—ah—situation bears—ahem—much of that aspect.”

“But surely we won’t have to give up our cars—”

“I regret to say that I don’t see how—ah——”

“Of course we’ll have to give them up,” said Cherry briskly, “the cars and everything else!”

“Everything? Please, Mr. Pennington! Of course I’m willing to make every sacrifice for the sake of my poor unfortunate husband—” she sighed, weeping gently—“even the place at Oyster Bay—the stables—most of the servants, but of course we ought to keep at least one car—the limousine and Catherwood. We simply can’t get along without the limousine.”

Much disturbed, the lawyer looked past her out of the window.

“It’s really too bad,” he said, “but I don’t exactly see—”

## **BABES IN THE WOOD**

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"Just this house," she pleaded—"and the limousine? Won't you ask them?"

Cherry had risen and stood at the foot of the couch, pale, but relentlessly intelligent.

"Muzzy!" she said sharply. And then again, "Muzzy! you've got to understand. There's no use beating around the bush. If you kept the limousine what would you pay for it with?"

"Pay for it?" replied Alicia triumphantly. "Why it's ours. It's already paid for."

"Tires—gas—oil—repairs—garage—Catherwood—four hundred a month," said Cherry glibly. She knew her figures here. "Where is the money coming from?"

"Why—" said her mother haltingly—"there must be *something*."

"There isn't," said Cherry jerkily. "Mr. Pennington has just told you so."

Mrs. Mohun stared from one to the other, but Pennington did not move his head.

"Nothing at all? I won't believe——"

"Tell her, Mr. Pennington," said Cherry in desperation, turning to the lawyer, "tell her the truth! There's no need to quibble. What has she got left? Her pearls, her diamonds—her silver——"

"Cherry! Be quiet!" gasped Alicia. "Please, Mr. Pennington——"

The lawyer had risen, paced the floor for a moment in desperation and then stopped by the window, his head bent, frowning deeply. It seemed as though he

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kept his head averted from this lovely tortured creature in order to strengthen his resolve.

"What Miss Mohun says is true," he said definitely at last. "Those things which have been given you by your husband are your property. That is a matter which must be determined. You will probably be obliged to establish your claim—the silver plate, the glass, the china, the pictures, the furniture and of course your pearls and diamonds—"

Alicia Mohun straightened, putting her feet to the floor and stared with her baby blue eyes first at one and then the other.

"My jewels—all? The silver . . . the glass . . . the pictures. . . ." she repeated in a daze. "Why, what use would they be without a house to put them in?"

"They've got to be sold, Muzzy, for what they will bring," said Cherry.

Mrs. Mohun glanced at Pennington who was helplessly shaking his bent head, and then fell back upon her couch. Her figure did not fall into the graceful lines which she had at first arranged to receive her visitor, but into a huddled attitude, quite unmindful of appearances. To Cherry, this abandonment of all pretense was more pitiable even than her grief itself, for never before had Cherry seen her mother give way to so authentic an emotion. And yet it shocked her too. It was like seeing her soul unclothed.

"Oh, God!" Alicia moaned, "it is all too desperate—too—horrible—I—I wish I were dead."

## BABES IN THE WOOD

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Cherry was by her side, touching her gently. "I don't, Muzzy," she said gently, "nor Bob, nor Dad. We'll just have to make the best of things—some way."

"But how? How—?" came in a stifled gasp. Cherry made a motion of her head and Pennington left the room silently. He had carried out his unpleasant mission, thankful for the intervention of the daughter which had saved him some of the brutality of speaking the truth.

But after the lawyer had gone the touch of her daughter's hand seemed only to bring more tears, as she yielded without stint to her despair.

"I can't face it"—she sobbed—"I can't. To have people slight us—because of this misfortune."

"Well," said Cherry with a shrug, "if there are any people who want to slight me let 'em begin at once."

"Oh, my dear," sobbed the mother, "you don't know the world as I do. I'm afraid—afraid to begin at the bottom again with—with nothing whatever to look forward to."

"Well, all I've got to say is," said Cherry, "that if people think less of me because of what's happened, I'll think a devil of a lot less of *them*!"

But her mother was not to be consoled and wept anew. "To think that all this should have happened, just when—when our future—your future—was so brilliant. And now—everything will be so—so different."

"Oh, I don't care, Muzzy."

"You do care. You *must* care," gasped her mother



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raising a tear-stained face. "I've worked so hard, you can't let it all go for nothing."

She straightened and sat up again, staring at Cherry, appraising her quickly with a despairing air of resolution.

"Perhaps we can save something out of the wreckage," she said. Her air of craft was familiar to Cherry, but it seemed very futile now. Her pretty mother seemed to have grown suddenly old—very old. "You've got to help, Cherry," she gasped. Cherry read her thoughts but gave no sign of comprehension.

"I mean John Chichester, Cherry," she went on quickly. "He has already been so kind—calling, sending notes and flowers—that I have hopes that his opinions may not have changed—that his regard for you——"

"Muzzy!" broke in the girl. "I won't listen to you."

"You must," said Alicia with the courage of despair. "You've got to listen to me. You're the only hope I have. Mr. Chichester spoke to me about you before this terrible thing happened. He wanted to marry you."

"Oh, did he?" said Cherry. "Well, I'm not going to——"

"Cherry!"

"I mean it. I don't love John Chichester. I haven't the slightest intention of marrying him—even if he should ask me to. And I don't believe he will——"

## BABES IN THE WOOD

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"Cherry! You can't understand how desperate the situation is—"

"Yes, I understand. I've realized it from the first—but I can't imagine any situation that will make me desperate enough for that—"

But at the signs of renewed hysteria which she saw in her mother's distended eyes and gasping breath she softened and fell beside the couch patting her gently.

"Now, Muzzy. You're not to think about this any more just now—not to talk about it, because, after all, Mr. Chichester hasn't asked *me*. Now has he? Perhaps he won't. There are a lot of things more important to think about. You'll be pretty sick, if you let yourself give way. And besides, crying like this is positively ruinous to your complexion—your eyes—are all swollen now——"

"Are they? I suppose they are. But Cherry, if you were only more sympathetic—if you'd only tell me—"

"Don't let's talk about this any more, not now. Later perhaps. You must bathe your face—and then a facial massage. Let me ring for Lillie."

"No, not Lillie. I'll do for myself." She dabbed at her eyes for a moment and rose wearily. "If you'd only try to think seriously of your obligations to us all—to *me*, Cherry," she said.

"I'll try to think of them, Muzzy," said Cherry calmly. "At present, Muzzy, you'd better bathe and then take a nap. You've had a trying afternoon."

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And so by dint of argument and persuasion Alicia Mohun was led tearfully to her ablutions while Cherry, greatly disturbed, went to her own room.

It was the first time that John Chichester's name had been mentioned to her since her father's stroke. He had never had a very large place either in her affections or her esteem, and the sudden gleam of hope that she had seen in her mother's eyes as she thought of Cherry's possible share in the restitution of their fallen fortunes affected Cherry with an unpleasant sense of carrying what had once been to her a mild sort of a joke into the realm of a very unpleasant reality. But the appeal to Cherry in the moment of extremity through the medium of her mother's emotions had not seemed quite fair. And though it had given Cherry a definite idea of how deeply ingrained was her mother's ambition for this match, to have put it even by suggestion to her daughter as a filial obligation was doubly disturbing.

From the days of her girlhood Cherry had always thought of her mother with mingled admiration and uncertainty—amenable to her physical perfections and charm, yet dubious as to her sincerity in her relations with those who were to be of use to her. Later on, as Cherry learned to think for herself, the beauty upon which people set such store became less impressive, for Cherry knew of the assiduities necessary to preserve it; and the sophistries, by means of which her mother succeeded in the social venture, seemed little less than hypocritical.

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But in the past the indulgence which her mother showed her had always compensated for these deficiencies, for Alicia had recognized in Cherry a spirit that was master to her own and Cherry, left to her devices, had gone her own way, unaffected by the elements in her mother's character with which she was unsympathetic. That she loved her mother was certain, but it was a habit that she should love her,—a habit inherited from the childhood days when she had wanted nothing more in the world than to be in all things as Alicia Mohun was. It wasn't that her love for her mother was any less than before, but it had changed in substance, for pity had taken the place of admiration and to-day, in her helplessness, her mother had touched a chord in Cherry's heart that had never been reached before. The sincerity with which she still clung to her great ambition, even in the moment of despair, was tragic in its futility. With pity, but just a little contempt, Cherry realized that if her mother were to have died to-day, it would have been with John Chichester's name, not her own husband's, upon her lips. It seemed as though, in his impotence and helplessness, she already thought of her husband as one already dead.

. . . Poor Dad!

It hadn't been fair of Muzzy to speak of John Chichester to-day. . . . Not fair to put this marriage to Cherry as an obligation the more necessary since the fall of their fortunes. Couldn't she see what a sacrifice she was asking? Couldn't she realize how different their situation was from that of a few weeks

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ago? Had she no pride—if not for herself—for Cherry? She didn't know—as Cherry knew—the history of John Chichester which Harold and 'Genie and others had told her. Cherry hoped that she didn't know, for ignorance might excuse her from the imputation of wishing to sell her daughter to a man who for years had wasted himself on illicit pleasures.

Never! She couldn't. She had a right to her own life. She didn't want to marry anybody but when she did she was entitled to the privilege of choosing for herself. Cherry buried her head in her arms on the window ledge and tried to think the thing out. Was she selfish to be thinking of herself at a moment like this? She owed her mother her life but now was she bound to render it back to her? She seemed somehow to feel that her mother had not the right to demand that. Anything else. But not her body to sell on the auction block.

She raised her head at last, still bewildered by this problem, got up and stole silently down the stairs to the sick room. She tiptoed in and the trained nurse met her with a smile. The patient was asleep, but Cherry went in and sat by his bed, listening to his breathing. It was much better if he slept easily like this, they had told her, for nature, violated, was attempting to restore itself.

The nurse went out leaving Cherry alone by the bedside for a while. Cherry watched and listened intently. She was sure that the patient was better. The breathing was unlabored now, and the expression

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of his face was quite normal. He was shaggy and unshorn, but the strong features of his face, though deeply indented by the troubles through which he had passed, seemed to have become refined and spiritualized by the touch of Death which had been so near. But Death had passed on elsewhere. She knew that he wasn't going to die—not yet—not now—for his waking moments were lucid and his mind had cleared. If they could only keep him from worrying—! Never in her life had she loved him more, never had she wanted so much to help him. She closed her eyes and prayed—fervently—to the God with whom her thoughts were so unfamiliar, to the Christ whose sacrifice had never before been to her more than a fairy story. Formless prayers they were, but they welled forth wordlessly from some deep recess within her, where she hid her spirit. She needed no Rosary for this, nor any ritual, but she knew that God must hear her.

And, in self-forgetfulness, she found strength. When she opened her eyes all things seemed to be made clear to her. The answer to her own problems lay here in the sick man, who had given so much for her and for them all. If Dad asked her for the sacrifice her mother had demanded, she would offer it, freely. Nothing else mattered but his happiness, not her mother's, nor her own. She would give—even herself. . . .

The nurse returned and, softly, Cherry went out of the room. She hesitated in the corridor, then noiselessly opened the door of her mother's room and

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peeped in. Alicia Mohun was at her three-angle mirror, the boxes of ointment before her, her slender fingers passing back and forth rapidly across her brows. She was so absorbed in this pursuit that she did not see or hear the visitor. Quietly Cherry withdrew. All was well.

## CHAPTER XII

### ALTERNATIVES

IT has been said that in the misfortunes of our friends there is something not altogether displeasing to us. The maxim is based perhaps on the assumption that all misfortune is deserving of censure and that censure of others is nothing less than a kind of self-praise. If this be true the indifference of the world may be taken for granted.

The world—Cherry's world—went gayly on in its accustomed way. The failure of James Mohun with its disastrous effect upon the fortunes of the family having been upon every one's lips for twenty-four hours had become merely a matter for a shrug of shoulder or a shake of head and in a week had been almost, if not quite, forgotten. "Bully chap," men had said, "lovely wife—ripping daughter! Pity he had tried to buck the game in a bad market. But those were the chances a fellow of his sort took. Glad to hear he was getting better. But he'd never be back in the game again. Never. Too bad." They said it, too, with a self-improving frown, as though to add, "You wouldn't catch *me* getting into a jam like that."

James Mohun's personal record in the failure was clear. He had been merely the victim of over-confidence in the star of his own destiny. Wall Street



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exonerated but forgot him. In less than a week men spoke of him in the past tense. To them he was already dead and buried in the vast graveyard where lay the bones of many who had hoped too much.

The business friends of James Mohun, many of them not without reproach, merely watched the market a little more carefully for some days, seeking other signs of weakness, and went their way rejoicing that his fate had not come to them. Their sisters, their cousins and their aunts permitted a few days to pass after Mr. Mohun's seizure and then politely left their cards at the door of the Seventy-eighth Street house. They were very polite. If they had written upon the cards "p. p. c." their intentions could not have been more clear. They were saying good-by.

By all accounts there would be no money to enable Alicia Mohun to continue in the social sphere to which she had been accustomed. Why, therefore, prolong the amenities of an acquaintance with this unfortunate family, which must as far as society itself was concerned soon end in oblivion? It was not their humanity which was at fault—merely their sense of expediency which took time by the forelock and anticipated the eventual.

But this sort of premeditation could not be laid to the door of Cherry's friends, who had been, from the hour of the disaster, and continued to be, splendidly loyal. All of them called and most of them Cherry saw. Phoebe Macklin and 'Genie Armitage came again and again to drive with Cherry or to walk with her

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in the Park in the afternoons when she could be spared from home. Vi Everard, Sylvia Wetherill and Gloria Towne did not come so often. But it was 'Genie to whom Cherry unreservedly told her troubles, for 'Genie had a heart that was big enough for two. Dicky Wilberforce came and proposed marriage again at once. Harold Galbraith skimmed lightly along the surface of her feelings. Teddy Waring was awkward and ill at ease. Tragedy of this sort was new to these children and they were at a loss as to its meaning.

The confession which she had poured forth to David Sangree had surprised Cherry as much as it had flattered her visitor. Why she had chosen him as a vent for her pent-up emotions when she had not even wept to 'Genie was more than she could understand, for she had always thought of him merely as a pleasant sort of an oracle, given to strongly smelling pipes and left-handed compliments. She remembered, too, that she had told him many things that she would not have dreamed of telling her mother who might not have understood. That was it. David Sangree understood. He had always understood. And he was so fearfully safe. She had always thought that telling him a secret was like telling it to her own thoughts or to the high heavens. She had even spoken to him about Bruce Cowan. . . .

Bruce! Her thoughts of him discomposed her. He was a part somehow of the disillusionments of that terrible night. There were things that she could not altogether forgive him for—his rough caress, his per-

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versity and sullenness, the painted woman at the dance hall. . . . There had been moments when she had begrudged even a thought to him, for he had never had her father's approval. And yet—he was so virile a force to reckon with!

As to John Chichester, his roses were very beautiful, but Cherry couldn't resist the impression that they partook of the nature of a mortuary offering brought from the great tomb in which her mother proposed that she should bury her hopes. He wrote her some very pretty notes and, tempted by curiosity to study him in the light of her desperate alternatives, she went driving with him in a closed car on a visit which he paid to Roslyn Towers, the huge country place up the river. He was scrupulously polite, egregiously entertaining, but not ardent. He was, it seemed, playing his game with a constraint which showed either exquisite tact or consummate craft. She preferred to believe him merely punctilious, delicately considerate of the position in which fortune had thrown her. It did not take her long to discover that her misfortune had made no difference in the inclination of his fancy, which, more even than before, seemed definitely to be set in her direction. She had not disliked him as a dancing partner or a supper companion. He had always been too amiable to permit of that. But now, in the limousine, his wisp of a mustache had a definiteness that was appalling. And the garish light of the cold wintry sunshine was merciless in presenting minute imperfections to which the warm dull glow of the ball-

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room had been more kind. When in animation his face broke up into not unpleasant conformations, but when in repose—as in the cases of most men who live by pleasure alone—his look was one of weary inquietude not far removed from pain. Good grooming had done something for the wrinkles at his eyes and his clothes were faultless, but Cherry couldn't resist the impression that he was merely a framework, conventionally covered with integument, from which something substantial had been abstracted. Nor had she been able to forget the stories that she had heard about him or the pseudonym which had clung to him from birth. All of these considerations now attained an added importance. This, she must reflect, was the person with whom she was invited to spend the remainder of her life in the sumptuous mausoleum where even a gay foot-fall or the sound of full-throated laughter would be a sacrilege.

The visit to Roslyn Towers, while made by Mr. Chichester ostensibly for the purpose of attending to business in connection with the estate, was, as Cherry surmised, probably a device to impress her with the importance of the position in the world which he proposed to offer her. He did not know that the more he offered, the more surely she realized the nature of the sacrifice demanded of her. The price flattered her but it renewed her sense of the value of her freedom. Having no reservations of any kind she meant that he should suffer from no false notions as to her habits or her character. And so, though naturally much

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sobered by the misfortunes which had overtaken her family, she spoke of many things with a frankness of which Mrs. Chichester would have disapproved. Even in her extremity it would have amused Cherry a great deal to bring about John Chichester's disillusionment. But her modern views of life, instead of deterring, seemed to add something to his amusement and his garrulity.

Hang it all! He liked to hear a girl say what she thought. It was a blessing that the world had changed so that a woman was beginning to think for herself. Why shouldn't a girl be a good pal to a fellow instead of a mere mincing doll as in the Victorian days? Companionship with a woman was now beginning to be distinctly worth while. Well, rather!

Cherry couldn't resist the temptation to banter, and she did it in her downright way.

"I thought you were always on good terms with girls of a particular sort," she said significantly.

"What! Oh—er—well, upon my word! Oh, I say——"

Cherry laughed.

"I suppose Miss Wanda Delaney—er—learned to think for herself at a very tender age," she ventured calmly.

"Wanda! What do you know about Wanda?" he gasped.

"Nothing, except what I've seen of her upon the stage. Perhaps I might say that that is a great deal. She has a lovely back——"

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"Oh, I say—"

"Wasn't it Wanda who invented the neck harness, now so frequently used on the stage? You know it. It lets a woman seem to be naked to the waist without being immodest?"

"Upon my word! Really, Cherry—!"

He was very much disturbed and plucked jerkily at his mustache for a moment, while Cherry rocked in silent mirth, the first laugh she had had in weeks.

"Oh, I don't care in the least who your friends are, Mr. Chichester. I only mention Wanda Delaney to make you understand that a girl's thinking for herself might be carried too far—or shall I say too low?"

Chichester found himself laughing at last—with her—at himself.

"What a witch you are!" he said delightedly.

But she couldn't disillusionize him. The very sallies meant to diminish his friendliness served only to give her attractions an added charm. And Cherry returned home with a big fish still hanging from her hook.

Cherry had avoided Bruce Cowan. He now seemed a part of another life which was very far away. In her heart she knew that she would have liked to see him. And this was one of the reasons why she did not permit herself that pleasure. "Demi-John" was a part of her martyrdom. Bruce Cowan was the source of disturbing exaltations. His youth and beauty called to her. Therefore she denied him. He had written her notes—tried to get her on the telephone, which Cherry

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had been very careful not to answer except once when he had caught her unawares, and she had hung up immediately. But she knew that he could not be put off indefinitely and one day they met.

It was late one afternoon when she was hurrying out for exercise. As she neared the corner of the Avenue near the Park, she heard her name called and faced Bruce Cowan.

"Why, Bruce!" she gasped.

And then, as she was silent, he said, "I've been waiting for you. Don't you want to see me?"

"I didn't want—I was just hurrying out for a little exercise."

But he matched his steps to hers and they crossed the Avenue into the Park.

She couldn't dismiss him—and the paths of the Park were free.

"Cherry," he was saying, "I've got to tell you how sorry I am. You were cruel not to let me. There isn't anything I wouldn't do to help you."

"What can *you* do? I suppose you know," she said quite calmly, "that we're ruined—"

"Your father's business—yes, but——"

"All of us. We had nothing but that—not a cent besides." And then, "I've got to go to work."

"You?" he said incredulously.

"Yes. Why not?"

The announcement seemed to stagger him. "You mean that you'll have nothing? The houses——?"

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"Mortgaged," she said briefly. "Oh, I'm sick of talking about it."

"My God!" he muttered somberly.

"You might as well know. Everybody will in time."

She walked rapidly while he strode on beside her. It seemed almost as though she were trying to get away from him.

"Don't you think enough of me to want to talk?" he asked.

"No."

"I understand. You didn't want to see me because you didn't want to have me sympathize—because all this brings us nearer together."

"How?" calmly.

"Because you're poor. Because you won't be the fashionable Cherry Mohun any longer—because I'll have a better right to marry you."

"You?" she laughed. "I don't see that. I never said I'd marry you. I never had any intention of marrying you when I had plenty. Why should I change my mind now?"

"Because. We're both—"

He broke off and gripped her arm as though to hold her.

"Cherry! Marry me! We'll get along somehow."

She shrugged her arm free of him, laughing nervously.

"No. We'd be miserable. I hate to be poor—"

"But if you're going to be poor anyway——"



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"How do you know that I am?" she shot at him.

He stared at her, frowning. "What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Do you mean—" His voice sank to a note of anger. "You don't mean that you're thinking of marrying that"—he gulped the words—"that damned, bandy-legged, brandy-swilling little swell——"

"If you're speaking of Mr. Chichester," broke in Cherry coolly, "I'd remind you that he's a friend of mine."

"*Are you? Are you?*" he insisted.

"What?"

"Thinking of marrying—just for his money—a brute like that—a worn-out——"

"I didn't say that I was. *You did.*"

"But that's what you mean."

"How do you know it is?"

"Well, I'm not going to let you marry him. Not while I've got a pair of hands. I'll break him to bits first."

Cherry thrilled gently. This was the sort of vaunting that always delighted her.

"How would that help if I married the bits afterward?"

"Say, Cherry, don't joke. I'm in dead earnest. Tell me the truth. Are you thinking of marrying Chichester?"

"I'm not thinking of marrying anybody. But I might have to. I can't live on air."

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"Marry me, Cherry. Say you will," he urged.

His ardor provoked her somehow. She couldn't resist the impression that he was taking advantage of the situation to gain his own ends—not hers. She felt that if she gave him the least encouragement her individuality was in danger of being merged in his egotism. That was it. He wanted her—not for herself—but for him.

"No," she said firmly. "We'd fight like cat and dog. We don't even get along now. It would be worse if we lived together." She grinned at the distant roof tops. "You'd be beating me in less than a week: and I'd murder you in your sleep with a flat-iron."

"Say, Cherry! I'll be awfully good to you."

"How much money do you make, Bruce?" she asked judicially.

"A hundred a week. And when the market is good——"

"But the market isn't good. You haven't sold a Magnificent in a month. You couldn't even sell mine for me—right now. Could you?"

"Um—I don't know. I might," he muttered.

They were not attune. But then, as Cherry reminded herself, they had seldom been of late. Subtly, they attracted, yet more subtly even, they irritated, each other. For weeks now she had not seen Bruce Cowan nor felt the need of him, but with his appearance she had felt the swift rush of old propensities, old antipathies, old discretions. He tempted her to the

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duel as old as the sexes which she fought with the rapier against his stone-headed bludgeon.

He walked beside her in moody silence for a while, Cherry triumphant that she had eluded him so easily. She knew that he couldn't sell her car for her at any kind of price that would be acceptable. But she meant still further to intimidate him. It was her duty. Having parried, she now thrust.

"There's no use in your talking to me about marriage, Bruce," she cut in cruelly, as he began again. "You couldn't afford a girl like me. I'm expensive—luxurious. I've been brought up never to think about the cost of anything. When I wanted something I just went out and got it. I *couldn't* go and live in a grubby little apartment up on the North side of Nowhere. And I won't. You'd want to turn me into a cook and housemaid for you. Why, I can't even boil an egg. And as for washing dishes—can you see me—?" She laughed unpleasantly. "And you out joy-riding in Magnificents all day with your Maisies? I guess not."

"Damn it, Cherry?" he said explosively. "You've no right to talk to me like that. I'm not going to stand for it—"

"What are you going to do?" she asked sweetly.

"I'll show you," he muttered savagely. "You wouldn't have stuck out for me against all your friends if you hadn't thought I was the man you wanted. You wouldn't have trusted yourself with me in the places

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you have if you hadn't believed in me. I never did anything to make you regret it, did I?"

"No." But her shrug and rising intonation still challenged him.

"Then you've got no right to believe I wouldn't play fair and square. You're just quibbling—just trying to play safe—to let me down so that if you want you can marry for money—sell yourself——"

"Bruce! You have no right to speak to me like that—" she broke in excitedly.

"I mean it. That's what it would be if I'm the man you want——"

"You're not!" she said furiously.

"I am. If I had John Chichester's money and position, you'd marry me fast enough," he finished.

This was unjust of him—ungenerous. She had never given him the right to talk to her like this. Never. Even if there had been any truth in what he said—and now there wasn't—not a particle of truth.

"I wouldn't," she replied. "I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man in the world."

Bruce Cowan looked at her flaming profile for a long moment, and then laughed. It was clear that he didn't believe her.

"Oh say, Cherry—!"

"I mean it."

"No. If you meant it, you wouldn't dare to say it."

She glanced around at him, but said nothing.

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"Oh, what's the use?" he went on more calmly. "You're just talking. But I know what you're thinking about. You think you owe your family more than you owe to me."

This startled her a little but she made no sign. And then in a moment she replied,

"What I'm thinking about, Bruce, is that we haven't met for weeks without quarreling. We always do. We're too much alike. What a hell it would be if we were chained together."

He only laughed again. It was a deep laugh now, rough and careless. "You'd have mighty little use for any man who agreed with you all the time. You don't want a man you can tame. You'd get tired of him in a week. That's why you like me. You can't tame me any more than I can tame you. We're always at each other's throats—you tantalizing—me, ugly, brutal sometimes. But there's fire in you that I can rouse—fire in me too—that I have to fight. But by God! It's worth while being stirred up like that! You daren't deny it. Call it fury, call it passion, if you want to. Whatever it is—it's big enough to make us two of a kind, you and me. Sometimes you hate me—but you stick to me through thick and thin, when your friends won't have me. I guess I hate you too . . . often . . . for the fool you make of me. But I'd fight for you until I dropped. Hell! And then you wonder that I'm worked up when I hear about you talking about marrying a thing like John Chichester . . . !"

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She was more disturbed than she let him be aware of. With his primitive instincts he had probed deep. Somewhere she had heard the words "sex antagonism." She didn't in the least know what it meant, but this speech of Bruce Cowan's seemed to make its meaning clearer. David Sangree had once told her of a tribe of Maoris among whom the wooer had to fight the girl of his choice for possession. Cherry had only made some frivolous comment in reply. But now curiously the story came back to her. Could the merely physical be eliminated from her thoughts of Bruce Cowan? How much would he have figured in her thoughts without his strength and beauty?

She made no reply at once, but he knew from her silence that he had made her think of him as he wished. She could hate him if she liked or love him if she chose, but she wouldn't think of him with indifference.

"Well?" he asked at last.

"You're a brute," she said calmly.

He only laughed at her.

"Because I'm the only one you know who dares to speak the truth."

"No. Because you're the only one I know who has ever insulted me."

"Oh, say. You don't mean that."

"You're a brute—" she repeated. "A brute!"

"No," he said. "But if I am, it's because you like me so."

She glanced at him furiously and averted her head. He shamed her. Was this all that she could make of

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a man? Fury—and he had dared to say it—passion! Was this the deep that called from her nature to his—his to hers? She cowered inwardly, groping among gentler instincts for the shreds of her self-esteem, recovered them one by one and turned to him.

“I think—I think that I hate you, Bruce,” she said quietly.

“Good,” he growled. “And I love you better than anything in the world.”

“Except yourself.”

“Except nobody. I want you, Cherry.”

She had to admit that his philosophy, if rugged, was at least consistent. There was a deeper—more sonorous note in his voice too which she recognized.

They had reached the corner of the Avenue and Cherry stopped.

“Good-by, Bruce,” she said calmly.

He took her hand and held it.

“When shall I see you again?”

“Never.”

“I’ll be waiting when you come out.”

“I won’t come out.”

She struggled to release her hand, but he held it firmly. “Please, Cherry. I—I’ve got to see you. What time will you come out? At five? At six? I’ll wait.”

“Bruce,” she said, struggling, “you’re making me conspicuous.”

“What time?” he persisted.

“Just to quarrel again?”

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"No. To make up."

"Let me go."

"Answer me—"

"No."

She broke away from him and ran.



## CHAPTER XIII

### UNPAID BILLS

**M**EANWHILE affairs at the Mohun house were falling into a hopeless state of confusion. Bob Mohun, inheriting some of his mother's lip-wisdom, was talking a great deal about what he was going to do and accomplishing little. Indeed, as Cherry soon discovered, instead of searching for a position he preferred, as his mother did, to talk in large figures of what would presently happen to their fortunes when the market should take an upward turn. He was not a dull-witted boy, but having been brought up to accept the gifts of the world as his particular inheritance, he had been slow to adapt himself to the idea of its sudden dereliction. However superficial and restricted Alicia Mohun's ambitions, they had at least been constructive. Bob's were merely noisy. They were both out of their element now. Adversity such as this was beyond their dreaming. The mere suggestion by Cherry of the stipend which Bob might earn from an office down town in some useful if humble capacity, filled them both with querulous reprobation. Cherry pressed her point beyond their protests. She had decided to cherish no false notions of optimism, for the mere amelioration of their present distress, nor to permit them to do so. The sinister

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shock which had set her mother and brother to futile planning had awakened Cherry to the rude necessities which faced them all. There was something of her father in the sturdiness with which she met the situation. Of course she was ignorant, incapable, inexperienced—but she was not supine.

There were the servants at the Oyster Bay place, the gardeners and grooms to be paid and dismissed. Cherry had a little money in her own small bank account and applied it to this purpose. The wages of the indoor servants at the Seventy-eighth Street house, besides Catherwood and the second chauffeur, were in arrears. Alicia Mohun had something less than a thousand dollars in her personal account at the bank. Bob had nothing. Without confiding in either mother or brother, Cherry found offers for both Bramble and Centipede, the hunters, and sold them at a sacrifice. Most of the money went to pay wages. Then, after an interview with her mother, she expressed her intention of sending away every servant in the house except the second cook and one maid upstairs. This brought a new outburst of weeping and precipitated a renewal of the discussion, so hateful to Cherry, as to John Chichester. But she eluded her mother with vague promises to consider that matter at a later moment, and as a sop even acquiesced in her mother's wish, for the present, to retain Lillie, her personal maid. It took some courage and self-abnegation on Cherry's part to dismiss the chauffeurs and to offer all the cars for sale, for this meant that there would be no more

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rides into the country unless she went by train or depended upon the kindness of her friends.

But the reduction of the force of servants was to be accomplished without initiative from Cherry. The delay in the payment of their wages had alarmed them and so when Cherry managed to pay them, most of the servants gave notice. And the second cook, who had been retained, was not slow to follow, leaving only a scullery girl in the kitchen to do all the work. The upstairs maid, foreseeing extra work, deserted, and even Lillie, finding some small duties thrust upon her, disappeared one evening with her baggage. Like rats they had deserted the sinking ship.

This defection thrust new burdens upon Cherry who had three rooms to clean besides helping with the sick man and relieving Miss Blythe, the trained nurse, in her hours off duty. Cherry assumed these new obligations with a sense of relief at having something to do. But it was not long before the drudgery of the housework began to wear upon her, and she diminished one by one all tasks which were not absolutely essential to a somewhat disorderly existence. Her mother, fretting constantly about one thing or another, was her greatest trouble,—the soiled towels in the bathroom, her bed badly made, the dust accumulating on mantel and dressing table, and Cherry, aware of her helplessness which showed no sign of coping with a difficult situation, did what she could for her comfort. Alicia Mohun spent most of her time in her own room, helping Miss Blythe occasionally, or wandering like a ghost about the lower

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floor, weeping into her eggs at the breakfast table to which she was now forced to descend, or gazing through the lace curtains of the drawing-room at the passing traffic of the street outside.

To the family conferences, she added little of advice or encouragement and was silent when Cherry, with troubled frankness, proposed that they should move at once to a small house far uptown or in the country. She listened only to Bob who still stimulated her hopes with pleasant possibilities that they might continue to live where they were. And during the day, when Bob had gone down town upon his wild-goose chase after the vestiges of their dissipated fortune, she remained aloof from her daughter, writing conciliatory notes to persistent dressmakers, whose demands, disregarded too long, were now becoming obdurate.

Cherry was painfully conscious of her mother's silence and estrangement. She knew what it meant. This was Alicia Mohun's protest against Cherry's indifference to the match with John Chichester. Her mother's manner grieved her, but it hurt her more than it grieved. And at times, as Cherry thought of the phrases in which Bruce Cowan had referred to the man, her tongue was very near an outburst of rebellion at the impervious assurance of her mother's point of view. But the piteous look of appeal in Alicia's eyes daunted her and she remained silent. Where was the advantage in bringing new misgivings into her heart—new pain into her weary eyes?

The situation became more difficult daily. If the

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mails at the Mohun's house brought fewer square envelopes, the oblong ones continued to accumulate on the library table at an alarming rate. It was astonishing how they grew in number. Cherry didn't know what to do with them. She realized that before her father was taken sick those oblong envelopes had always miraculously disappeared from the library table. Now they remained there in a huge pile, disregarded, evaded, by the rest of the family. They were of different colors and bore the familiar names of tradesmen, dressmakers, tailors, public service corporations. Others were from lawyers with curious names—or from collection agencies. At last in a desperate moment, her mother having decided to take a drive with an indulgent friend, Cherry sat calmly at the desk and, opening all the envelopes, carefully made a list of the obligations that remained. The result of these calculations was astounding, for her addition revealed a total of almost twenty thousand dollars in unpaid bills.

Cherry sat for a moment stunned at the revelation. Twenty thousand dollars! There must surely be a mistake. . . . She went over the list again and again, verifying and adding the columns of figures both up and down, at last convinced that she had made no errors. Twenty thousand—nearly twenty-one thousand dollars—most of the bills accompanied by urgent appeals, veiled threats, or threats unveiled!—Cherry's bills many of them, for gowns, hats, shoes, stockings, contracted in the name of the sick man upstairs. . . . Where was the money to come from? Cherry got up

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and paced the floor, nervously, turning over again and again the sheaf of bills representing her own and her mother's personal share in this obligation. Her bills—for gowns that she had worn—for some of the very clothing on her body at the moment. These bills would have to be paid, all of them. The sale of the automobiles would help, but at the low prices which Cherry had set would not provide as much as one fourth of this amount. And her mother and Bob were counting on the sale of the machines to pay the immediate household expenses!

Cherry was troubled. For the first time, she found herself thinking of John Chichester in mere terms of money. And even if she dared to marry him how could she bring him such a heritage as this! The thought of it revolted her—to consider her body in terms of shoes, stockings and dresses—of future stockings and dresses from his bounty!

It was in the midst of these disturbing meditations that Alicia Mohun returned to the house from her drive. Cherry heard her in the hallway outside and in a moment her mother entered the drawing-room. But at the rustle of papers she turned and beheld her daughter's head peeping forth above the mountains of bills.

"Why, Cherry," she said, "what on earth—?"

"Just bills," Cherry broke in. "Why, Muzzy! How sweet you look! It's done you good, hasn't it?"

"It was very pleasant. Mrs. Heywood is *so* kind. She's been telling me about everything."

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Cherry's troubled brows relaxed. There was a little smile upon her mother's tired face which was painted here and there with pretty touches of pale color. Cherry understood. Mrs. Heywood had the gift of light gossip. Alicia Mohun, after a month of retirement, had lived for an hour in the atmosphere which was the breath to her nostrils.

"I'm so glad you went, Muzzy," said Cherry gently. "The fresh air has made you young again."

Alicia glanced at the mirror above the mantel while she unpinned her veil.

"Oh, I'm a fright," she said with petulant shrug. "There's no use trying to tell me. . . . What are you doing with the bills?"

It was such a pity to tell her, to bring her down to the sordid business of the moment, when she had just snatched an illusive hour. . . .

"Oh, just looking over them. Don't bother now—later perhaps, when we see what we have—"

But Alicia, having removed her veil, remained, fingering the papers and staring at the columns of figures which represented Cherry's labors.

"But surely, Cherry, there can't be so many. I know there are a few bills of mine upstairs—I've managed to defer payment for a few weeks—but this—! Why, your father was always very careful to keep the current accounts paid every month."

"I—I'm afraid he didn't. I'm afraid he couldn't, Muzzy," said Cherry.

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"It's too bad. But we must manage somehow. Four or five thousand——"

"Twenty!" said Cherry succinctly.

Her mother stared at her for a moment as though she had not heard correctly.

"Surely, my dear, you have made some mistake——"

"No. I've been over them a dozen times. I wasn't going to bother you, but I suppose you'd better know."

"How terrible!" Mrs. Mohun dropped into the arm-chair at Cherry's side, her expression suddenly settling into the lines of helpless anguish so familiar to her daughter. "And I'd just managed to forget it all."

"I'm sorry. But there's no use evading any longer. We've got to do something—sell something—then move away from here as quickly as we can."

"Oh, Cherry—where?"

"I don't know. A little house—we'll be quite cozy——"

"Oblivion!" gasped Alicia. "I know—in a grubby street of yellow brick houses—soiled women in mob-caps, dirty children, the odor of boiling cabbage——" She bent her head, while her lovely shoulders gave a shudder of repulsion. "Oh, Cherry, I can't—I can't!"

Almost the very phrases that Cherry had used to Bruce Cowan and the picture seemed even more repellent now when seen through her mother's eyes. But Cherry set her lips in a thin line of resolution.

"We've got to, Muzzy," she said at last.

Alicia Mohun began weeping again, more and more



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unrestrainedly, so Cherry got up and sat on the arm of her mother's chair, her arm around her.

"Don't, Muzzy dear—"

"I can't, Cherry," she whispered reproachfully. "Oh, that you should ask this of me!"

"I'm only telling you—"

"That you should suggest such a thing, when it's in your p—power to h—help us all——"

"Muzzy! Do you think that's quite fair to me?"

"Yes," gasped her mother, raising her head with desperate conviction. "Yes, I do. Don't you owe something to me? Haven't I brought you up in every luxury, taught you everything that you should know to take a splendid place in the world, provided for you the most brilliant match of this generation——"

"But, Muzzy," broke in Cherry calmly, "I don't love John Chichester."

"Love!" The note was slightly satirical as if born of an experience which covered every possible emotion that the world could offer. "Love! What can you know of love!"

Alicia's tears had stopped flowing. To Cherry it seemed as if they might have been congealed at their sources by the sudden freezing of her mother's heart. And there was a hard look of determination in her eyes such as Cherry had only seen there lately. The battle was on. Alicia Mohun was fighting for her life. Cherry got up wearily and crossed the room to the window where she stood looking out. She heard her

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mother's voice, rising in its desperation to a thin nasal tone which was unusual to it.

"What do you know of love?" she cried shrilly. "Why, you're only a child! Oh, you've been about a good deal, but you don't know the real meaning of things. Love is merely friendship magnified. I didn't love your father when I married him. I liked him, we were good friends. He was worthy. I knew he would amount to something. But it wasn't what one would call a grand passion—"

"No. I know it," said Cherry calmly.

"There are no grand passions nowadays unless they end in the ditch. Passion in itself is a debasing emotion. It can't last. Look about you. The happy marriages are the calm ones—the thoughtful—the premeditated ones—where friendship blooms into something warmer. Ah, believe me, my dear, I know what I'm talking about. If you like Mr. Chichester—and you admit you do—it is all that's necessary. Oh, I know you're timid—frightened at the step you'll take—but with a devotion like his, wealth, position, all your troubles will be smoothed away. You'll admit, won't you, my dear, that in every sense of the word John Chichester is a gentleman?"

At the window Cherry stirred.

"The word 'gentleman,'" she said, "means so many things."

"I don't see—won't you explain?"

Cherry gasped in desperation.

"Just because a man comes of good people he's a

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gentleman," she said, "because he dresses well, has money and doesn't have to work with his hands—because his manners in public are those of other gentlemen. That's all that matters."

"I don't understand."

"I'll try to tell you if you don't mind my speaking plainly—?"

"Go on."

"There's a code of the gentleman in John Chichester's set. He can get as drunk as he pleases, provided no one but other gentlemen see him drunk or get drunk with him; he can keep his mistresses, provided only other gentlemen know the mistresses he keeps. There is only one rule in the code. He mustn't throw his vices into the faces of his ballroom friends, the women relations of other gentlemen——"

"Cherry!"

"It's the truth. A man of your set can do anything, provided he isn't flagrantly disgraceful in public. No one questions his habits or his private life. I know. So does everybody. There *are* people who look down on that sort of thing but not in our set—not the world—your world and mine. Imagine barring your door to John Chichester just because he kept the actress Wanda Delaney!"

"Cherry! You don't believe that story!"

"Yes, I do. And about his drinking. He used to be carried out of the Olympian, night after night."

"My dear, who has been telling you all those tales?" said Alicia, much disturbed.

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"Everybody. You've heard them too. You must have," said Cherry, facing her mother with spirit.

"One hears tales about every one," said Alicia cautiously. "You can't expect a man of John Chichester's position to get off scot free. Besides with his temptations one could hardly expect him to be an angel—"

"No, I don't expect him to be an angel—or any man," said Cherry. "But I don't want the man I marry—especially if I marry him in premeditation—to be a middle-aged wreck, a hollow shell who marries at last just because there's nothing left for him to do."

"Cherry! How *can* you speak of Mr. Chichester like that?"

"He *is* a wreck. You know it. He's like a squeezed orange—or dried fruit. I don't like his mustache or the jerky way he has with his hands. Oh, I *couldn't* marry him, Muzzy, to love, honor and obey him. I don't love him, I can't honor him and I shouldn't obey him. I'd like to for your sake. I would. But it's too much to ask of me. Even to save us. Put yourself in my place, Muzzy," she pleaded. "I'm young—with all my life before me. I want to live. I want to be myself. I want to be happy. Haven't I got a right to be that?"

"But, my dear, why should you believe that you will be unhappy with John Chichester?" asked her mother, groping desperately among her conventional fatuities. "Marriages of this sort are always arranged in France—in other countries—and among royalty all over the

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world. Some of the most successful marriages the world has known——”

“Successful!” said Cherry scornfully.

“Yes. Please listen. I speak the truth. You dream of love. All young girls do. But that sort of fascination doesn’t last. It rarely outlives the honeymoon—then shares the fate of all other violent emotions—burns itself out with its own fire and ends in disillusionment and indifference. The reason why most husbands and wives aren’t divorced is because they become a habit to each other, even their faults—their imperfections. You will never find a man without faults. You yourself will not be too easy to get along with. It will be so much safer for you to marry a man old enough to know his own mind, even if he isn’t perfect, who by his kindness and devotion will offer you something better than a mere youthful fascination—something more enduring, the well-being, the happiness which comes of a perfectly ordered life, every comfort, every luxury——”

The sophistry of the argument passed over Cherry because she knew that it came from her mother’s mind, not from her heart, and she listened wistfully, hoping to feel in her mother’s eagerness some warm note of affection. But her concern had the complacency of complete self-justification. It was of Cherry as John Chichester’s wife that she thought—the summit of her worldly ambitions, not of her own daughter whom she meant to offer as a sacrifice to them. Not a word of affection—only those of expediency. When her mother

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paused for lack of breath a moment of silence followed.

"Muzzy," asked Cherry quietly, "you knew, didn't you, that Mr. Chichester was what I've told you?"

Alicia Mohun moved uneasily and looked past Cherry out of the window.

"Of course I've heard tales!"

Cherry bent her head, thinking deeply.

"And you've still considered this marriage—without investigating?"

"Those are not matters which a woman can discuss. I preferred not to think about that side of life."

"But you knew that the stories were probably true?"

"I thought as little of them as I could."

Cherry was silent another long moment, thinking.

"You'd still be willing, if these stories are true—other stories perhaps of dissipation even more condemning—you'd still be willing that I should marry John Chichester?"

Alicia Mohun's face in the garish light from the window settled into the hard lines of intolerance.

"I—I—wouldn't believe them," she said firmly.

Cherry turned from the window to her seat at the table, her head bowed in disappointment and pain. The most terrible part of the conversation to Cherry was her mother's incuriosity and unconcern as to its effect upon Cherry herself. For she went on rapidly—

"Now don't interpose all sorts of foolish objections, Cherry dear. You must believe with all my experience that I'm capable of giving you the best advice. Hasn't my judgment always been good in social mat-

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ters? Haven't I had enough foresight and wisdom to bring our family into the circles of the very most select? You must trust to me. Cherry, won't you?" She pleaded as she rose and took up her gloves and wrap. "It isn't as though you cared for any one else. You don't. I can't believe that Bruce Cowan means anything to you—not seriously. Why, the thought is impossible! He's not your sort."

"It isn't necessary to speak of Bruce," Cherry muttered.

"Or Dicky—or Harold—though either of them would be better than Mr. Cowan."

"I don't want to marry anybody," said Cherry sullenly.

"But you must, you know, dear. You promised me you'd think about it. I'm not going to say anything more now. But I feel you're not going to disappoint me. You can't, Cherry. It would be terrible . . . ! Good God! If you refused, I believe it would kill me. It would, Cherry—"

"Oh, Muzzy! Muzzy!—"

Cherry fell into the chair by the library table and bent her head to her arms. She did not weep then. But as she fell forward the pile of bills at her elbow toppled and fell over her.

"You must, Cherry. There's nothing left—nothing to save us. Those bills! How can we meet them?"

One of the papers had slipped down below Cherry's eyes. It was from a fashionable dressmaker:

"Three ball dresses for Miss Mohun . . . \$1200."

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She didn't hear what her mother was saying. Her mind was dulled by the persistent reiteration of the one idea. The words no longer meant anything—the pleas, the prayers, even the threats. They seemed to come to her from a distance, from beyond the void that had suddenly grown between her mother's heart and her own. And then a phrase caught her ear and she listened, concentrating with a kind of fascinated desperation.

"You've got to, Cherry," the shrill voice went on, "for your father's sake if not for mine. Those bills are his. He told us we could make them. He wanted us to. God knows I wouldn't have made them, if I'd only known what was to come. But we did make them, you and I, and they've got to be paid. And the doctors! It will be frightful—but he has to have the best of attention—it's the least we can do for him. . . . Now and in the future. But where is the money to come from unless. . . ."

Cherry covered her ears with her fingers and rose, her eyes blinded with tears.

"Don't say any more, Muzzy. . . . Not about Dad! I'll think about it. Really I will. But not now. . . . Please, please. . . ."

She felt her mother's arm around her shoulders but she turned away, blindly rushing from the library and upstairs to the sanctuary of her own room.



## CHAPTER XIV

### A NIGHT VISITOR

**A**FTER some days of deliberation David Sangree had offered his services as an instructor in ethnology at the University of Columbia. He had been quite sure that Bartlett, his old friend and preceptor, would be glad to have him, for not long before he had confided to Sangree that his department needed another assistant. The offer had come as a surprise but was none the less welcome and within a week, though adapted by training and experience rather to research than to teaching, Sangree had taken up his duties in classroom and lecture hall. The work was not difficult, only onerous, and he found plenty of time to carry on at home the preliminary studies for his new book which was to deal with the migrations of the Turkish stocks into Armenia.

He saw little of Cherry and made no other calls at the Seventy-eighth Street house. He imagined that with her new responsibilities she was finding no leisure to resume her friendships or to seek the diversions of which she must be so much in need. But he thought of her much and talked of her with 'Genie Armitage whom he met twice at small informal dinners at the Lycetts, and the Warings. He knew that things were going badly with the Mohuns and that Cherry was facing a

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problem which would have daunted a spirit more intrepid even than hers. He wanted to see her again and from day to day he waited hoping that she would write or telephone him, arranging a meeting or asking him to the house. The news from 'Genie that the Mohun automobiles had been offered for sale showed the situation with a definiteness which needed little explaining. Poor Cherry!

The moment of concord in which she had laid her heart bare to him still sounded sweetly in his memory, so sweetly indeed that it had given him the hope of further moments of such communion. He wanted to help her. He knew that she would be needing advice, even such as he might have to offer her, and it hurt him a little that she had turned elsewhere. At least, he supposed that she had done so, because he had formed no high opinion of her brother Bob's intelligence and initiative or indeed of Alicia Mohun's, and it was difficult to believe that Cherry was attempting to cope with her problems alone.

Dr. Sangree sighed as he turned the key in the door of his apartment and entered. It had been a tiresome day. The future which for a few short weeks had beckoned so alluringly now seemed strangely sterile of possibilities. He saw himself gradually settling, as Dr. Bartlett had settled, into a gray and colorless middle-age, worn and daunted by small problems, when he might have been able to master great ones. Six months ago he wouldn't have thought of the fugacities of middle-age, indeed he wouldn't have thought of mid-

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dle-age at all. It might, in a sense, be said that he was born middle-aged without knowing it. He rarely thought of time except as a means to a given end and the years before him had been allotted one by one to the accomplishment of particular intellectual tasks, made possible by the possession of means which he had proposed to devote to the great work that he had set out to do. Now, he could see quite clearly, he was destined to become a mere classroom drudge, a hanger-on of universities, the eventual occupant perhaps of a Chair endowed somewhere by a contrite and illiterate millionaire who believed ethnology to be, perhaps, some sort of pietistic panacea which would aid the cause of his own redemption.

David Sangree took off his coat and hat and slowly prepared himself for the hour of relaxation beside the evening lamp. He was still in his own bachelor apartment, the lease of which did not expire until the following summer, when, as he well foresaw, he would be obliged to move into one room somewhere further uptown in accordance with the exigencies of his reduced income. Having made himself comfortable, he sat filling his pipe deliberately, and then, puffing solemnly, gazed at the Whistler etchings on the wall in the obscurity beyond the cone of illumination. It was very restful here in this sanctuary, conducive to-night to reverie rather than to reconnoitering along the battlegrounds of contemporary investigation. Little the dreamer by nature, he found himself engaged in a retrospect of his few months of pilgrimage into the

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golden age of youth which the remarkable Cherry Mohun had renewed. It was by contrast to this period of his recrudescence that the years before him seemed suddenly to have grown impressively uninteresting. It wouldn't have mattered nearly so much if he had lost his money before he had learned to appreciate its value in a world which had recently attained for him certain novel and rather pleasing attributes. He had never been definitely aware of the potentialities of his inheritance until the present moment when he had lost it. Money in itself had never meant anything to Sangree except as a means by which much scientific work might be accomplished. His needs were simple, his habits frugal. And eliminating his long-cherished plans for the future, he would find it quite easy to get along on the small salary from his new post and the thousand or so a year which remained of his lost fortune.

But he was not content. He would have liked to help Cherry in her trouble, at least he would have liked to be able to offer help. It would have made him very happy to place himself and his money at her disposal. Even at this moment he was not convinced that such an offer of assistance was a necessary concomitant of an offer of marriage. He would as soon have thought of proposing to the Falls of Niagara as to Cherry. And the warnings which she had given him, couched in the jargon of good-fellowship, had been enough to place him rigidly on his guard against the display of any but the most Platonic of

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expressions of good will. His call upon Cherry, during which she had poured forth the tribulations of her conscience, had awakened him to the dangers which lay in the path of pity and reminded him that, after all, it was the quality of his mission of friendliness upon which she presumed and upon which she still relied. He would have liked though. . . .

*Ehew!* This kind of thinking wasn't leading anywhere, except into mazes of hopeless mental discomfort. It wouldn't do at all. What driveling idiocy a fellow could get into if he let his fancies run away with him! If there was any one person more unpleasant than any other it was the middle-aged sentimentalist!

Sangree reached toward his library table and took down a book with a paper jacket in gay colors, the latest mystery and adventure story, a type of literature, if it may be so called, designed particularly for the mentally-jaded wise and the worldly-jaded foolish. A book of this sort was always to be found on David Sangree's table. As he had once expressed himself to Cherry in an execrable pun, "if not the attic salt, at least the pepper of the best cellars." The volume was called *The Purple Cabriolet*, and in a moment, with a freshly-filled pipe, he was lost in its intricacies.

A light tap at the door. This was unusual, and he stared for a moment blankly. He expected no visitors in his rooms, for the building, dedicated entirely to bachelors or to those who passed as such, housed few acquaintances of his, and he could think

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of no one who would seek him out at this hour. The knock was repeated less timidly, so Sangree rose impatiently and opened the door just far enough to enable him to peer into the dimmer shades outside. He was inhospitable perhaps, but prudent, for his costume consisted of nothing more elaborate than pajamas, dressing gown and carpet slippers.

That his prudence was justified was immediately made manifest, for the figure outside the door was feminine in contour and presently emitted tense sibilant sounds.

"Rameses!" it said, "is that you?"

Sangree started back almost closing the door in his dismay.

"Cherry! Good Lord! What are you doing here?" he gasped.

"Standing in a chilly entry. Aren't you going to let me in?"

"Oh—of course. That is—oh, say, Cherry, can you wait a minute—?"

"I've already waited several. There'll be a scandal in high life if you don't do something."

"Oh, yes, of course. But I'm in dressing gown and—er—pajamas."

"I don't mind—if *you* don't," she insisted. "I've got to see you."

"Oh, all right. If you think it's quite prudent. J—just give me time to slip into the next room and then come in. Or if you like I'll join you on the street in a jiffy."

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"No, no," cried the voice in an agonized whisper. "Some one is coming. Hurry, please!"

So David Sangree fled incontinently into his bedroom, seizing underwear, trousers and shirt as he ran, aware that Cherry had entered almost immediately behind him. With the feverish activity of a fireman responding to an alarm he got into his discarded clothing, even to collar and cravat, and in a few moments reached the doorway, flushed, disturbed, grinning fatuously and still fumbling at his collar.

Cherry was standing by the table, the light catching little iridescent threads of her coat which was moist from the fog and rain outside. Her head was in shadow but the reflected glow from the litter of papers and reviews painted in warm colors the fluent curve of her neck and chin. Her figure gave an impression of alertness like that of a bird, just alighted on a twig in an unfamiliar neighborhood, poised delicately for flight.

But as he entered the room she turned, thrust out an arm to him, smiling her twisted smile.

"I hope you don't mind my coming—" she began.

"Mind! Good Lord, no. I'm delighted—very. But surprised. You see I'm not used to visitors—especially—" He paused.

"Especially girls?" she put in.

"Well—er—you see, girls don't come here. It's a bachelor apartment house—"

"I knew it. But I knew the number of your suite, took a chance and walked up the stairs. The boy at

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the door thought I was a charwoman, I hope. I have on my old clothes," she explained.

Sangree was regarding the door dubiously. "I'm not quite sure that I ought to let you stay, Cherry."

She smiled down at her fingers which he had forgotten to let go.

"If I don't care, why should you?"

And then, withdrawing her hand slowly as she turned soberly toward the table, "I had to see you at once," she said quietly.

He looked at her again and then glanced at the locked door into the corridor as though debating whether to open it or not. As he hesitated she spoke again.

"Aren't you going to ask me to sit down, Rameses?" she asked whimsically.

"Oh—of course," he said hastily, drawing a chair toward the gas log. "Now that you're here I suppose you might as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb. Let me take your coat."

"No, thanks. I shan't stay long."

As the glow from the lamp reached her face, he thought that she looked weary. Her cheek bones seemed higher, there were faint touches of purple around her eyes, and the scarlet of her lips was faded. There was, too, a sober pucker at her brows born of some inner commotion. She waited a moment until he was seated before she spoke.

"I had to see you, Rameses," she repeated. "Something happened to-day. I came straight here."



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"Nothing serious? Nothing——?"

"Yes, if I choose to make it so. It was serious enough to make me feel the need of advice—the advice of a friend——" She paused and then finished with a dubious smile—"even at the risk of my reputation."

"It makes me happy to think that you'd come to me. I've wanted to help you, Cherry. I thought you'd forgotten me."

"I hadn't. But I've been fearfully busy. You know we have scarcely any servants and I have to help."

"Things are so bad as that?" he asked as she paused. She nodded.

"Oh, things are just about as bad as they can be—except for Dad. They think he's better, thank God. But everything else—oh, it's a devil of a mess!"

"There will be nothing from the wreck?"

"Nothing so far as I can see—nothing, that is—except me."

He examined her face with a puzzled frown.

The slight shrug and the compression of her lips were bitterly ironical.

"I don't think I understand," he muttered, though glimmerings of her meaning were coming to him.

Her lips opened to curl unpleasantly.

"It's very simple. I'm the only asset left to the House of Mohun——"

"You mean that you——"

"That I'm for sale to the highest bidder—preferably John Chichester," she said calmly.

"Cherry!"

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"Yes. He wants me. It's beautifully simple. I marry him. The family honor is saved. That's why I came to talk to you. An impulse. You think I'm mad to come here. Perhaps I am. I had to talk to somebody—not Muzzy or Bob, or even 'Genie—somebody who understands—somebody who can think for me. I can't any more. I'm just at the point where I'll do something foolish one way or the other."

She was speaking rapidly, breathlessly, the words tumbling forth end over end, but there was a lively sequence in her phrases, between which he read meanings she did not utter.

"Your mother—?" he began.

"I want to be loyal to Muzzy," she gasped, throwing out her arms in a hopeless gesture. "I want to be loyal. I'd like to think she had a right to ask this of me if I could, Rameses. But I can't somehow. I'm incapable of judging. Oh, I've thought and thought, but thinking only seems to make things worse. I can't think of anything except his scrubby mustache." She laughed nervously. "Funny, isn't it, how I could be obsessed by such a horror—of a mere mustache!"

David Sangree did not smile. He was frowning at the gas log.

"I take it," he said soberly, "that you—er—do not care for—er—John Chichester, then."

She glanced at him quickly and shrugged. "Need you ask?" she said.

Sangree raised his head abruptly, "I suppose I should have known."

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"There's no question of caring for him," she went on. "Muzzy realizes that as well as I do. But she has set her heart on it. She appeals to my sense of duty to the family, to her, and to—to Dad. That's how she reaches me—hurts me—here." She put both hands to her breast as though to still a sudden pang of conscience. "I would do anything for Dad even to selling myself as Muzzy wishes. But somehow I can't think that he would ask this of me. He was never ambitious—in business, yes—but not socially, as Muzzy was. He often told me never to marry a man unless I was sure of myself. But I can't talk to him. He's in a very dangerous condition. He just lies between sleeping and waking with intervals in which he tries to talk. He's getting better. I'm sure of it. Sometimes I think he knows everything that is going on. There's a kind of wisdom in his eyes, like a child's, poor dear, and he's very submissive. But I can't talk to him—ask his advice at a time like this. He's got to have his chance—without worry of any kind."

"Of course. And your mother understands this?"

"Yes. But I think she resents it a little that he should have failed her at a crucial moment. With all her worldliness she's so very like a child!"

As she paused, Sangree turned toward her slowly. "Tell me how far this thing has gone. Has John Chichester spoken to you?"

"No. He hasn't. But he has spoken to Muzzy—"

"Then you're not committed in any way?"

Cherry got up suddenly and took two or three steps

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away from the table. Then turned with a quick gesture of dismay—or perhaps of self-abnegation.

“I don’t want you to think I’m disloyal to Muzzy,” she repeated. “I don’t want you to think that I’m forgetting what I owe her—loyalty, allegiance! I know what those words mean. But to me they don’t mean submissiveness, Rameses, to a wrong—the perpetration of a sin. I can’t be submissive when she’s done what she has.”

“She insists, then—?”

Cherry walked to the mantel and leaned against it, gazing down at the incandescent clay. It seemed to him that in the three weeks since he had last seen her she had caught some glimpses of the inner meanings of life which had never before been revealed to her, that trouble and pain had already dispelled fatuities, stripping her to essentials of character for her combat with the world. He thought her more mature, if less radiant; more discerning, if less pretentious. She spoke more quietly now as though in the actual presence of her moral obligations.

“I must tell you the whole miserable business, Rameses—from the beginning. My mother was very much flattered by John Chichester’s attentions. I never gave him any encouragement. Muzzy did. It was a feather in her cap. He was a catch. It was the brilliant match that she had been preparing me for. I didn’t realize it. I didn’t want to realize it. I was perfectly contented with boys of my own age. But she thought that in time I would understand the meaning of

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the magnificence of becoming a Chichester. I didn't. It bored me horribly. She took me to luncheon at the Chichester house to be looked over by the old lady. I felt like shocking them to end the farce, but I didn't. I think it amused me a little to see how beautifully I could behave. It seems that I passed muster."

She paused as though awaiting comment—but none came. Sangree, his fingers clasped judicially under his chin, was gazing into the fire.

"Then," she went on, "this terrible thing happened. You know what it did to me. I've had no thought for anything but Dad—and trying to grope a way out of the dark. I found over twenty thousand dollars in bills with nothing to pay them with. I had a scene with Muzzy—in which the old subject was renewed—my responsibility to Dad. It made a painful impression on me."

"Poor Cherry!" he muttered.

"Then suddenly the other day I had an idea that Muzzy was in communication with John Chichester without my knowledge. I don't know why—just one of those queer intuitions that women have. She began encouraging me to go out for exercise, to go to see 'Genie, and other people. And one day I saw John Chichester leaving the house as I came home. It seemed as though Muzzy was drawing the net tighter and tighter around me. He came to see me too, but he didn't speak. Evidently he was under instructions. I hadn't refused to consider him, nor had I refused to do what Muzzy asked. You see, I was horribly uncer-

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tain as to which way my duty lay. It was ghastly. I hadn't disliked him before, but now I had a positive distaste for him. He was a caricature of Romance, a mockery. I saw hideous things in him—I couldn't forget what I had heard—hideous things that he had been—that he might still be. He had never been objectionable before. I was overwrought, you see—the more so as the obsession grew that it was my duty to marry him.”

“By God!” Sangree muttered below his breath, “you shan’t.”

She glanced at him a moment as though startled at his vehemence and then went on hurriedly.

“To-day a thing happened which made me desperate. Oh, you don't know how long I struggled with the temptation not to come to you. I knew that if I didn't come I might yield to what seemed inevitable—for they had pushed me against the wall, Rameses.”

“Go on,” he gasped huskily.

“This afternoon things came to a desperate pass. A lot of the dressmakers have been threatening suit. Two of them came to see me to-day, one cold and unpleasant, the other violently disagreeable—women that had smirked and bowed and scraped and flattered not long ago. I had to promise them something—the money from the sale of one of the machines which I am to get to-morrow. But it wasn't quite enough—so I began thinking of what else could be sold or pawned—I had a little money left in bank—but not enough, so I thought of Muzzy. She had, I knew, a small balance.

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Muzzy was out driving with somebody but I got the keys to her desk and found her check-book."

She paused and took a deep breath, lowering her tone a trifle. "You won't wonder at my surprise, Rameses," she said quietly, "when I tell you that I found that she had a balance of more than eight thousand dollars!"

Sangree started forward in his chair.

"You mean——?"

"John Chichester," said Cherry calmly. "She'd borrowed ten thousand dollars from him. It was a payment—in advance—on *me*!"

He was on his feet, his hands deep in his pockets, striding up and down the rug. Silence. Just the gas log sputtering. David stared at it, frowning. But his very quiet, she knew, was deep with meaning. At last he took his hands out of his pockets and turned.

"Surely you're mistaken," he said, almost in a whisper.

"Oh, no, I'm not——" she said with a shrug. "At first I thought that she might have sold her pearls. But I found them—in her jewel box—also her diamonds. Everything else was accounted for. Besides—opposite the deposit entry was the one word scrawled 'loan.'"

"Good God!"

"Oh, don't think too harshly of her. I try not to. She has been so helpless, so desperate, poor dear, so terribly unhappy over the failure of everything that meant happiness——"

"Happiness!" he growled, "when she'd throw you like a bone to a dog!"

## *A NIGHT VISITOR*

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"I don't know whether she asked him for it or whether he just offered it—" she went on. "But there it was. I was shocked, but I was angry too. And I waited for Muzzy, there in her room, the check book in my hand."

Her voice died away as though in a weakness at the memory of what had followed, the account of which was brief but eloquent of Alicia Mohun's shame and her own self-abasement.

"I accused her of it. She denied it at first. It was pitiable, she couldn't think of any lie that I could swallow. She admitted it at last—in an agony of tears and pleadings. She was terribly disturbed. But then so was I. I left her. That was three hours ago. I haven't seen her since."

She stopped speaking, her voice trembling, and sank into her chair. But she did not cry. She had come to him for friendship—understanding, but to Sangree it seemed that perhaps she feared the physical tokens of sympathy which he might offer in response to any demonstration of distress . . . or else that she had no further capacity for tears. . . .



## CHAPTER XV

### DECISION

**D**AVID SANGREE was silent for a long moment. Cherry had sunk with a gasp into her chair and sat with her chin in her hands gazing into the blaze as though her mind in its obscurity still struggled toward warmth—toward light. She hardly seemed to be aware of him standing by the table behind her, his arms folded, his brows bent while he struggled with her problems. Her confession had stirred him deeply. If absolution was what she wanted he would give it to her.

He took two or three paces away, thinking deeply, and then turned, one hand on the back of her chair, following her gaze into the fire.

"Of course it's all very terrible. You don't love John Chichester. You can't marry him—that's out of the question—" His voice sank a note, the deeper in its vibrations. "It isn't your body only that you'd sell, Cherry, but your immortal soul. Nobody has a right to dispose of that, not your mother—not even you."

He heard the quick intake of her breath as she leaned back in her chair as though a weight had been taken from her shoulders, but she said nothing, and he spoke again even more deliberately.

"I'd rather see you dead than married to Chichester," he added.

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She turned her head to look at him but he went on as though thinking aloud.

"I—I'm glad that you don't care for him. That would be bad enough. But to marry him just to save a situation or to bring yourself the luxuries which misfortune denies you—that would be abominable! May I speak plainly? To me there's no very wide distinction between the woman who solves the problem of poverty by signing a marriage contract and the other woman"—he paused for a moment—"who doesn't sign anything."

Cherry moved uneasily. It was what Bruce Cowan had meant. But the phrases had a deeper significance from the lips of David Sangree.

"I don't know just what to say to you," he went on, "except—er—that I've always had faith enough to believe that you would do nothing so—er—unintelligent as that. So, if I'm shocked at what has happened to you at home I'm not surprised at your horror of the consequences of such a marriage. You're quite right. You have your own life to live. No matter how much you owe your mother—your father even—you do not owe them as much as that."

He paused a moment and then said slowly—

"I don't know that you've—er—given me the right to question you, but it seems rather important—er—Do you care for any one else?"

She turned her head toward him, but he did not look at her.

"Why no, Rameses," she said quietly, "why do you ask?"

## THE HOUSE OF MOHUN

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"Because—I thought perhaps—er—Wilberforce."

"Dicky! Why did you think of him?"

"Oh, I just thought—it's none of my business of course—but he has money, hasn't he?"

She smiled at his awkwardness, and then settled back in her chair.

"Yes, perhaps," she said with a shrug, "but if I were marrying for money, I might as well marry the *most* money, Rameses, mightn't I? I don't want to marry anybody." She made a petulant gesture. "Can't you see? Least of all because I *have* to."

Sangree fell silent. He was thinking of Bruce Cowan but he did not speak his name. Perhaps he feared to drop this bombshell into the midst of a situation which was already troublous enough. But her last phrases seemed for the present to answer him. He had paused with one elbow on the mantelshelf and seemed to be groping with difficulty for his words.

"It's a pity, Cherry—your position, I mean. You were meant for early marriage, I think—all the girls of your set are. Every year a whole flock of you comes—like (shall I say?)—like sheep upon the market. If you aren't disposed of—engaged—it's called—within a reasonable time, you are a failure. You see, marriage as a profession is what you're brought up to seek—without knowing about anything except—er—the clothes—bridesmaids. . . . Lombroso, you know, says that women were meant to be the parasites of men. I don't agree with him. Nietzsche too. But

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I've never been able to think of you as a parasite, Cherry."

"And yet that's what I am," she said. "That's what I've been trained to be. Curious I've never thought of it before."

He grinned at her cheerfully.

"You didn't have to think of it. All your thinking was done for you." And then with a frown, "But that's what makes your situation so cruel."

"But I can't blame Muzzy for that. She only did as other mothers do." She shrugged in deprecation. "I was to make a brilliant marriage. I might have married somebody with money in the course of time. I might have drifted into it. I would have had something to offer in exchange—money of my own—to help pay my way. But don't you see how impossible the thing is now? I have nothing—less than nothing. . . . Debts of honor. Somebody must pay those. But I can't marry—make myself what you think I'd be—for that. I can't sell myself to John Chichester—or to anybody."

David Sangree went to the table and took up his pipe.

"You don't mind if I smoke?"

"No, please do."

The question and answer seemed to put him on a surer footing of his old relationship to her—to eliminate the possibilities of the merely sentimental, and to place him definitely in the rôle of guide, philosopher and friend.

## *THE HOUSE OF MOHUN*

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He filled his pipe slowly and then sat in the chair upon the opposite side of the fire.

"Let's face the situation honestly," he said at last. "The burden of it seems to fall upon you. There's a way out. There always is, if you've got the courage."

"I will do anything—anything," she gasped.

He regarded her for a moment steadily and then spoke deliberately.

"Then you've got to play the game—"

"What do you mean, exactly?"

"The greatest game in the world—the greater when the odds are against you. The game—Life. You're just beginning to know what it means."

"It frightens me a little. . . ."

"It needn't. The odds are not too great, if you'll let me help."

"You?" She started forward in her chair, staring at him in incomprehension.

Sangree lighted his pipe, puffing slowly.

"Yes, I can help you. You know, I'm not—er—altogether ruined. I have a little money——"

"Dr. Sangree! Never—!"

"Please listen. I haven't the slightest need for it. I get a princely salary at the University, you know."

"I couldn't——"

He frowned—

"Whom would you rather owe? Me or Chichester?"

"Why—that isn't the question."

"It is—that, precisely. Wouldn't you rather owe

## DECISION

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me ten thousand dollars than owe it to John Chichester? If you wouldn't, then you can't set a very high value on our friendship. And, you see, Cherry, you aren't under the necessity of marrying *me*!"

She turned her head away and bent it into her hands. "Don't joke, please!" she muttered.

"It's no joke. The obligations of friendship have no string tied to them. That's why they're so significant. I'm desperately in earnest. That loan must be repaid. If your mother won't do it, you will have to—"

"She *must*—"

"Perhaps she will. But you'll need every dollar that you can find. The money I offer you will help to pay some of your debts until you can move to a more modest neighborhood. What I propose is this: I have a house uptown. It's nothing much in the way of a house, but it will do. The people who occupy it have been waiting to move into an apartment and will give it up on short notice. I can arrange to have them out in six weeks if you say the word. The rent is not large—only seventy-five dollars a month—and you needn't bother about paying me until you're ready. I've got enough."

"I couldn't let you do this—I couldn't—"

"I shall consider your acquiescence the measure of our friendship—" he cut in gravely.

"Where you give all and I give nothing?" she murmured.

He laughed softly. "You can't measure friendship

## THE HOUSE OF MOHUN

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in money, Cherry. There are things that can't be bought or sold. They're prizes only won by deserving effort. I attract your attention by falling from a horse, but I only hold it by getting on again—"

"Please—"

"You see, if I hadn't broken my arm I should never have known how sorry you could be. That was really worth discovering, but it wasn't information that I could have bought, except at the cost of my broken arm and your own lacerated feelings. These are prices rather higher than the dollar mark, because they have to do with the things of the spirit."

As she was still silent he communed with his pipe for a moment. "If you care for my friendship enough to test its value, now is your time. You are, I think, the one girl friend I have ever had in my life. When I first met you I was headed straight for the oblivion of scientific abstractions. At the age of thirty I was already a kind of soulless thinking machine, absorbed in the history of the material and intellectual development of man, quite forgetful that there might be some interest—a scientific as well as a personal interest—in the results of that development. You aroused my curiosity. You puzzled me and yet, somehow, I couldn't believe that any one so vital as you were could be unimportant in the cosmic scheme. Circumstances have confirmed that impression. I think I disliked you a great deal at first. You confronted me with a placid superiority of worldliness which made my mental attainments of no account whatever—"

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"Please, Rameses—"

David Sangree laughed.

"If you don't mind, Cherry—it gives me a pleasure to recall the early stages of our strange acquaintance—when you unwrapped the bandages from Rameses the Second, took him up out of his sarcophagus, and restored him to life. That's the sort of a reincarnation that's really worth while. Don't you recognize your handiwork? If you didn't think I'd grown into a more or less human sort of a creature you wouldn't have dreamed of giving me your confidences. I am human. You've made me so. I feel your troubles as though they were my own. I know you'll succeed, but you need a helping hand right now through the worst of the mess, and I'm going to give it to you. It isn't as though I were denying myself anything in helping you. I'm not. I've never spent my income—except this winter when I went about a little—and you know how little that means to me! I've got everything I want—everything. And it will make me very happy to feel that I'm doing something for you. The money is rotting in a bank. Nobody need know where you get it. Come now, Cherry, say you will—won't you? You'll make me very happy—"

He paused and stared at her, for a slight sound had come from her bent head and, as he looked, a single tear glinted in the lamplight. He took a pace forward and bent over her awkwardly.

"Cherry!" he muttered, "don't!"

It startled him a little that his offers should have



## THE HOUSE OF MOHUN

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had this effect upon her. He had tried to put into his tones an air of matter-of-fact which should set her at her ease. He knew that what he proposed was unusual but then so was the quality of their friendship, which upon his own part had never given her the slightest suggestion of the sentimental. He knew, as though she had told him, that had she thought him in the least degree in love with her she would have hesitated long before paying this visit at night to his bachelor apartment where she had emptied her heart to him of its troubles. He was dismayed at the thought that she might have read his mind, for this discovery, as he knew, would bring an end to the frankness of her regard. Had she not told him many times that she liked to be with him because he was of the sort that didn't make love to her? So he stood hovering over her bent figure, his fingers extended yet scarcely reaching her shoulder for fear that something in their touch which hadn't been in his voice would warn her of the depth of his emotion. Her position, too, here alone with him in his rooms was delicate enough without the hazard of undue sentiment. So he straightened and knocked his pipe out on the hearth while his voice with an effort found its most dispassionate tones.

"Oh, I say, Cherry, don't cry, please. There's nothing to cry about, you know."

"I—I didn't come here for th—that kind of help, Rameses," she gasped. "I—I just came because I had to tell somebody. I—I just wanted you to say wh—what you *did* say—about not marrying John Chi—

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chester—that was all. And you said it. I knew you would. It took a weight from me that has been bearing me down to earth—for days. But I didn't want you to offer me the kind of help you did—"

"Why not? I hoped you were giving me the right to offer it."

To his great relief she straightened now and wiped her eyes, smiling at him with her old frankness.

"Good old Rameses!" she said, "as if I didn't know that you were lying about your princely salary! Why, you're as poor as I am."

He was discomfited for a moment and looked away from her.

"You mean that you won't accept my offer?" he muttered.

"I can't, Rameses—not the money. Not the money—" She thrust out her hands to him with a generous motion of appeal. "Don't ask it of me. I couldn't take it. I don't know when I should be able to pay it back to you."

"That needn't matter."

"It does matter." She gave her eyes a final dab and turned to him again with a smile. "But I'll take the house—rent it. I hope we shall be able to manage that. We've *got* to manage it somehow. And the sooner we move the better."

"I'll make the arrangements at once."

She rose and drew her wrap together—with the same air of decision with which she compressed her lips in resolution.

## *THE HOUSE OF MOHUN*

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"There'll be a terrible fuss but I'm equal to it now. Bob will storm and Muzzy—" She paused and gave a dry laugh. "We may have to take Muzzy away in the ambulance. But she'll have to go in the end. My mind is made up. Oh, Rameses!" she gasped. "If you knew the joy of coming to this decision! Any decision! . . . If you knew how vague and uncertain everything has been! And now—though the future isn't very clear—it's something to take the first step and know that it's the right one."

"We must plan for the future," he muttered, "but I'm not afraid for you. You'll let me help, won't you?"

"Of course." She thrust out her hands again and he took them both in his. "You've done such a lot already. You see, I can't get along without you."

Her eyes were heavy with fatigue and there was a pathetic droop at the ends of her lips. At that moment she seemed very childlike in her dependence upon him. She seemed so much to need the solace of a caress. It would have been the most natural thing in the world for him to have taken her in his arms and given her some of his own strength. But he only pressed her hands in his. Their eyes met for a long moment, the frankness of hers blending slowly into soberness under his gaze and turning at last to the clock upon the mantel which marked the hour of one.

"I must go at once," she muttered.

He picked up his hat and coat.

"I'll go with you," he said.

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"Do you think that's wise? You'd better just let me slip out. I'll find a taxi—"

"Impossible! I'm going to take you home."

She stood for a moment at the mirror, adjusting her hat.

"I know I've done a foolish thing," and then with a careless shrug as she turned toward him, "but I don't suppose it matters much, now."

"I don't agree with you," he muttered savagely as he reached for the knob. And then in a lowered tone, "The elevator runs all night, but we'll go down the stairs. Wait a moment—"

He went out into the silent corridor and at his signal she followed quietly. If she found some excitement in the venture, Sangree did not share it. He merely glared angrily down the silent hallways as they passed the landings. On the third floor a head poked out of an open door whence came the sounds of male voices, and they both heard a comment made, the sound of an exclamation, followed by suppressed laughter.

Cherry was sniggering softly, but Sangree caught her elbow and hurried down the stairs.

"Damn them!" he muttered.

On the ground floor the elevator man was dozing on his bench, but he straightened as they passed him and down the front steps into the street Sangree felt the creature's gaze boring into his spine.

But he gave a gasp as they reached the friendly darkness. They walked rapidly and found a taxi on the Avenue.

## THE HOUSE OF MOHUN

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"Good Lord!" she gasped, with a sudden accent of contrition as the vehicle spun upon its way. "I never once thought of *your* reputation!"

He laughed easily.

"I should have, Rameses. Will you forgive me? I didn't think——"

"Nonsense!"

"Who were the people on the third floor?"

"I don't know. But why the devil they couldn't have kept their door closed——"

He grinned comfortably at her in the darkness.

"But it doesn't matter in the least—since no one could possibly have recognized you."

"Poor Dr. Sangree!" she said. "If they call you a Don Juan——!"

"They may. But the idea is rather absurd, isn't it?"

"I don't think I like it, Rameses," she finished soberly.

At the house in Seventy-eighth Street he saw her to the door, and after exacting a promise that she would visit the house uptown with him in a few days, he dismissed the taxi and walked down town alone.

She was brave. He had always had a sense of a fine quality of nobility beneath her heedlessness. . . . Strength too and character. For she had steered a straight course, untouched by the signs of weakness that were all about her. But how much strength had she? How much courage? Had she enough to conquer the tendencies to which she had been bred? It seemed to him that she would need it all. She had

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made a brave decision, impressive in the certainty of her inspiration, but he was sure that it was to be put to the trial. Already she had heard the rasp of bitter tongues, felt the gnaw of a heavy heart, known the pain of lonely silences, but these were only the beginning of her venture. There would be some trying moments—some dangerous ones. How was she equipped to meet the bitterness of a world which had shown only a smiling face? He saw her radiance already dimmed, her color stained with weariness, her warmth chilled by the cold touch of materialism. . . . And yet. . . . Was it not possible that out of the struggle which was to come—something more splendid than the radiant Cherry might emerge—a creature sentient to the real meanings of life, a woman of full stature, her imperfections burnt off in the fires of life, her character incorruptible in disappointment and pain? The flowerlike beauty of her face which had first attracted him seemed less significant now. It was of other beauties that he was thinking, the scarcely revealed inner beauties of her spirit which had emerged into the light at the first need.

He could not reproach himself for the counsel that he had given her. God knows he had no hope of benefiting by it. He needed no salve to his conscience in having advised her against the thought of this preposterous marriage, born out of the enormities of modern social dogma, which traced their origin back to the jungle where the value of women was reckoned in cattle. There was higher value here—not to be computed in

## THE HOUSE OF MOHUN

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the conventional way. Alicia Mohun did not know this Cherry that Sangree knew—had never known her—nor was John Chichester, with all his knowledge of the characteristics of women of another sort, capable of passing judgment upon her.

Sangree smiled grimly as he thought of John Chichester. Ten thousand dollars! How many head of cattle did that amount represent according to the appraisal of the jungle north of Forty-second Street? A shrewd device of Mrs. Mohun's, but paltry, unworthy, and not quite human. Chichester wanted Cherry—but he should not have her. No, by God!—anybody but him—even Bruce Cowan—but not John Chichester!

Pacing furiously on his way home Dr. Sangree was in a savage mood when he reached his dwelling place. The night man at the elevator was nodding over a newspaper when Sangree entered but he rose with an air of sudden awakening to his responsibilities, which, it seemed, had been definitely challenged.

"I don't like to speak about it, sir," he said with a solemn air as he seized the hoisting apparatus in the lift, "but you must know the rule about women here at night."

Sangree boiled within but he governed his tongue.

"Well?" he asked.

"That young woman in your apartment, sir," said the man coolly. "I don't want to report it, but you see I'm here to keep the rules. It won't do to let it pass."

A swift moment in which to decide whether to knock the man down or to hand him a bank note. Sangree

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resisted the first impulse which would have precipitated the car into the basement or sent it through the roof.

"She was my sister," he lied calmly. "She didn't know the rule. She won't come again."

"Oh, I see, sir. But of course I have to do my duty—"

The elevator stopped and Sangree drew a bill from his pocketbook.

"All right. Just forget it," he growled.

"Oh, all right, sir. But you understand—?"

"Yes, I do. Good night," he snapped and went down the hallway. Damn the man! He was too civil by half and his solemn air didn't conceal his insulting metropolitan omniscience.

Sangree turned the key and opened the door. The room was redolent of her moments of penance and his own asceticism. The comedy in the elevator seemed a cruel piece of buffoonery. He had lied to the night man and paid for the privilege of the lie. Convention again—which made a falsehood of the most irreproachable acts of existence! In his moment of doubt Sangree had said that Cherry was his sister. . . . And yet after all was not that the truth . . . ?



## CHAPTER XVI

### THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY

**D**URING that month Sangree saw little of Cherry, but her calls upon the telephone reassured him as to the quality of her courage and without comment she reported the success of the undertaking. He put together, from fragments of conversation, the scene at the dinner table of the members of the Mohun family when Cherry had exploded her practical petard into the midst of their hopeful hallucinations. To them it must have had something of the nature of an infernal machine. He did not hear until afterward what part Jim Mohun himself had played in the plan or what were its reactions upon mother and brother, for, as Sangree knew, Cherry was already ashamed of her mother's weakness and her brother's inefficacy and meant, if it were possible, that no one should know of her difficulties in convincing them that there was nothing else to be done. Upon Bob's part he imagined long-winded arguments, reinforced by vague hopes and vaguer promises; upon Alicia's, tears, recriminations and, perhaps, hysterics.

In the Olympian Club he heard of the advertisements of the sale of the contents of both houses at auction.

## *THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY*

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At the Club also he saw John Chichester, but that gentleman now passed him by with a sober air and a mere nod of recognition. From 'Genie Armitage he learned of the sale of Alicia Mohun's pearls over the counter at Tiffany's for a considerable sum, which possibly explained John Chichester's air of preoccupation. "Demi-John" was not a person who cared to admit a failure in anything, though the end of his hopes with regard to Cherry must have been revealed to him very soon after Cherry's visit to Sangree's rooms. His manner puzzled Sangree, though it did not annoy him. He imagined, at first, that Alicia Mohun had told John Chichester of the nature of Cherry's curious friendship for Sangree, but that did not seem to explain John Chichester's air of restraint, which was evident when they were in the same room—an air which had some of the milder qualities of reprobation.

At first he had been inclined to think this one of the meeds of his own financial misfortune, for Chichester was sufficiently worldly to appraise his associates by an assessment of their financial value in the social scheme. But later Sangree revised this opinion, and it seemed to him that her mother would have been the last person to whom Cherry would have confided the secret of her visit to his rooms or the nature of the conversation which had been its object. But he knew as well as though Cherry had told him that John Chichester had definitely been given his dismissal and he suspected that the sale of Mrs. Mohun's pearls had

## *THE HOUSE OF MOHUN*

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provided the opportunity for a rather satisfactory conclusion to that affair.

John Chichester's friendship had been unimportant to Sangree, his confidences unsought, and it made no possible difference to him that the older man had decided not to continue his amiable advances, but his snubs were so pointed now that Sangree could not resist the impression that some influence of which he was unaware was behind this rather mystifying change of demeanor.

But, whatever its cause, Sangree regarded it with the good-natured tolerance of one who has little to lose. If never before, John Chichester now belonged to a phase of life which Sangree relinquished with little regret. His dues at the Olympian were paid until the end of the year and, since he could no longer afford its luxuries, his resignation would take effect at that time, when he would adapt himself to the situation now demanded by his slender means.

Sangree had taken his new point of view with singular calm. Those of his new acquaintances who chose to follow him into social exile could do so if they liked, but he cherished few hopes of them. His position was quite different from that of Cherry, who must, if he knew the world, begin very soon to feel the stings of benefits forgot. He knew that she was to suffer acutely, if she had not already done so, in her alienation from those who had once been her intimates. But it now appeared that, once having come to a decision, Cherry had performed her duty to herself and her family with

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a precision and dispatch which counted not upon the opinion of the world.

But her plans, as he later discovered, had been made less difficult of accomplishment by strength from an unexpected source which came to her with all the gentleness of aid from Heaven itself. After the talk with her mother which had resulted in a renewal of their quarrel, it seemed scarcely possible for her to fight her battle alone, but, having made her decision, she did not recant, though she saw nothing short of violence as an alternative to yielding to her mother's insistent threats and tears. It had been a dreadful morning and she sat in her father's room thinking of the last disturbing interview that she had had with her mother. James Mohun was upright near her in his morris chair, where he now spent most of the day in the sunlight by the window overlooking the street. She thought that he was dozing but some impulse made her turn to look at him. His gaze was fixed on her—a calm, untroubled look—"like that of a child which has just awakened," as she expressed it. He almost seemed like somebody that she didn't know, or rather like the father she scarcely remembered in the past, when she was a child, before the family came to New York, when they had lived in the old house at Leiper-ville; for there used to be time then for Jim Mohun to romp with Bob and Cherry in the evenings before bedtime. It was the look that he had in his eyes when he tucked Cherry into bed. She couldn't understand at first. She had become so accustomed to the shadows

## *THE HOUSE OF MOHUN*

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of worry that had come when they had moved to New York. Now it seemed as though the illness which had struck him had suddenly gone, taking with it all the pain which had been its cause, leaving his mind and body quite placid and undisturbed. His speech, too, was distinct, clearer than it had been since before the stroke. It almost seemed as though for some purposes of his own, until that moment, he might have been dissimulating.

"Now, Cherry," he said to her gently, "tell me. . . ."

And then, as she protested, he went on very calmly: "Tell me exactly. . . . I know a great deal. . . . I have heard. . . . I haven't slept always and the doors have not always been closed." He smiled at her again, but he seemed to know exactly what he was about, and when she tried to evade him he cornered her.

"Your mother," he said softly, with a glance at the door, "has been trying to make you marry John Chichester to save our fortunes. I know that. You don't want to marry him and you've refused. I know that too. I'm glad." He leaned forward and patted her shoulder. "I was afraid that you might agree on my account—but I'm glad that you wouldn't!"

She caught his hand in hers and kissed it, because he had made her very happy.

"Everything's been all wrong with us," he went on calmly. "You see, I've been putting the cart before the horse—all these years. I was trying for something for all of us that we could have had all the time without trying. Happiness. It was at home—

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it ought to have been at home." He paused and frowned, "Cherry dear, I don't think I wanted the money for myself so much as for us all—for what it would give you that *you* wanted. But no matter how much I made we always seemed to need more—"

"Oh, Daddy—don't!" she whispered painfully.

"Oh, I'm just telling you this because I'm glad you haven't made the same mistake that I did. You can't buy happiness that way. And it would have been worse for you, living with a man you couldn't love—"

He seemed to feel by the touch of Cherry's hand how happy he was making her.

"Sometimes I wished to God I'd never left Leiper-ville. We *were* happy there, Cherry, and we didn't have any too much money. But *she* didn't understand—Muzzy didn't. And she never could have been contented back there again with the cast-iron deer on the lawn." He laughed quietly, "You remember those deer, Cherry? Always standing waiting—listening, watching, when I came up from the station. I liked 'em. They were home. I wonder if they're still there."

Cherry had never known that things like that could mean so much to him. She murmured something and he went on in a moment. "I'm counting on you, Cherry. I've always felt that I could count on you in a pinch. The pinch has come. Even the house at Leiper-ville will be sold. We're completely ruined. There's nothing at all, of course, but the furniture and your mother's jewels."

He made the statement passively almost with the

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air of one who remarks upon the misfortune of another. It seemed to Cherry that if he was without passion he was also without regret—as though his air of abstraction was a part of his illness in which the world had forgotten him and he the world.

“Of course, my dear,” he went on calmly, “we will have to change our whole mode of life.”

“Yes, Daddy. I’ve planned that.” And she told him of David Sangree’s offer of the house in One Hundred and Eighty-second Street.

He listened soberly, nodding his head in approval.

“That is good,” he said, repeating the word—“good, very good—” And then, with another glance at the door, “And your mother?”

Cherry moved her shoulders helplessly.

“She still hopes for something out of the wreck. So does Bob. But they’ll agree. They must.”

He nodded his head sagely.

“Yes, they will agree,” he repeated. “They must.”

Cherry glanced at him in disquietude. His tone was so unlike the one that she had known—so gentle—so colorless. For a moment the thought came to her that his mind might have been enfeebled by his illness, but the look in his eyes reassured her. Their gaze was keen, untroubled, almost judicial in its calm. He seemed to be seeing all things with a clearness which came from some new inner vision that had been granted him during the period of his unconsciousness.

Greatly reassured, and responding to his questions,

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Cherry began telling him what she planned to do—the sale of the furniture—even her mother's pearls—if necessary. He nodded slowly, but definitely. Yes, even that, he agreed. When she had finished he was silent for a long while, looking out of the window, and Cherry thought that she had talked too much.

But as she moved in her chair, he spoke again, very quietly.

"Will you please tell your mother to come to me here, Cherry dear?" he asked.

She started up, dismayed. "Do you think you'd better, Daddy?"

"Yes, my dear—if you please," he said firmly, "and at once."

He was still looking out of the window. She felt that his words were a command such as he had never issued before. And, as she still hesitated, his voice was more calm but more insistent.

"You will do what I ask, Cherry—if you please."

What happened in that room after her mother had entered it, no one but husband and wife were to know. Alicia Mohun, pale, but dry-eyed, came out and moved like a sleepwalker down the corridor to her room where she remained alone for the remainder of the day. Later Cherry stole silently into her father's room. He was still in his chair by the window. He was quite motionless and his eyes were closed, so, for fear of disturbing him, she went out and up to her



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own room, wondering at the miracle that had been accomplished so quietly.

. . . . .

Though David Sangree had placed himself at Cherry's disposal for any task that she did not care to accomplish herself, she did not call upon him. Perhaps she took pride in being able to attend to the details of reorganization herself—or, perhaps, she did not wish to intrude upon his busy hours unnecessarily. He had a feeling that when she really needed him she would let him know. But just the same he couldn't conceal an anxiety on her behalf. He had never been able to forget that, in spite of her air of self-sufficiency, she had not been trained to responsibility such as this.

When he met her at the house in One Hundred and Eighty-second Street to make the final arrangements before the Mohun family moved in, she seemed to be in a state of nervous repression, intensely alert mentally, with a cheerfulness which was a little too determined to be quite natural. He thought her thinner, her motions more abrupt, her short laugh more frequent, her comments more frankly ironical. She gave him the impression of one riding at high speed along unfamiliar roads, somewhat miraculously passing all hazards without mishap. But it was obvious that her experiences, if they had concentrated the forces of her character to the definite focus of her will, had already taken from her some of the graces of exuberance which had been among her careless charms. And while her manner vaguely disturbed him, he asked her no ques-

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tions as to her difficulties, preferring to wait until she chose to mention them, if at all, of her own will.

The thought that constantly recurred to him was that she had accomplished too much. It was not her health but her peace of mind—of which it seemed somehow to be the expression—that caused him inquietude. He could not believe that this nervous obsession of duty—for it seemed nothing less—could be permanent. The spring was coiled too tightly. The pendulum had gone beyond its leisurely arc and, obeying a natural law, must sometime swing far in the opposite direction.

After she had gone over the house, making suggestions as to changes of furniture to suit the needs of the family, she dropped wearily into a chair in the room which had been selected for her father and took out her cigarette case. The moment for confidences had come.

"I want to talk to you, Rameses," she said, "I haven't had a chance before. It seems as though I have been driven from one unpleasant duty to another with no time to think for myself."

"It has been a terrible responsibility," said Sangree with feeling. "I've thought of you often."

"I'm glad you have," she said. "You know—" and she laughed—"I've felt as though some devil were chasing me—that I'd have to keep going—to prevent him from catching up. I must keep going, I need a skid to my wheel—that's certain."

Sangree frowned. "You need a rest," he said severely.

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"No," she went on quickly, "I don't think I want a rest. I'll do something damned silly if I sit down and think. I think I've had a little too much—all at once—that's all. It's gotten me twisted somehow. I can't quite find the reason for it. The whole thing is like a death in the family without any funeral to go to. I could understand that. You could grieve, go in mourning, and have it over with, but there isn't any end to trouble of this kind. It just goes on and on, without any end in sight. I've had bitter moments, unhappy ones, but none of them is so bad as the indifferent ones, when I don't care what happens."

"That's rubbish," he broke in.

"Thanks. I know it. And I wanted you to tell me so. It's comforting somehow. You see, Rameses," she finished with a grin, "it's you who have been the skid to my wheel."

"Oh, have I?"

"Yes. But I need an emergency brake or something. I'm in a funny mood. I guess I've always had my own way too much. I never had to think about anybody but myself. This thinking for others isn't my line at all. It was a kind of adventure at first. I liked them all relying on me. I liked making the beds—at first. It was a sort of game, being useful—a sort of a novelty. But I don't mind telling you that I'm rather tired of it all."

She took a few puffs of her cigarette but Sangree didn't reply, though he was watching her keenly.

"Why shouldn't I tell the truth—to you? I miss the

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machines, my runabout especially. I miss the crowd too. They used to come running after me—Gloria, Vi, Sylvia, Phoebe—'phoning every day. Now, nobody does—except 'Genie. I've been busy when they called. God knows I can't blame them! I haven't been much fun when I *have* seen them. I don't suppose they see any reason why they should get down on *their* luck just because *I* am. I wouldn't either if I were they. The boys have been all right—but somehow I haven't felt much like seeing the boys. And nobody likes to be hearing hard-luck stories all the time. And so, of course, things are going on with them in the same old way—parties, jazz, joyrides. It hurts me a little that they can jog on without me—don't you see?"

"But you could go out now, if you wanted to. Why don't you? It would do you good—"

"No. Things are changed somehow. Don't you suppose I feel it?" she broke in quickly. "To go with that crowd, you've got to go with them all the time. And besides, the invitations for the real things have stopped coming—even to Muzzy. She feels the slight horribly. She would, you know. It's just as though we were all already dead and buried. And I guess we are, so far as ever going about again is concerned. Oh, I don't care about the invitations. It's the neglect of one's friends that hurts the most—and then the careless nods of acquaintances." She laughed bitterly. "H—m! Yesterday I passed the little Carruthers snip on the street—you know—the 'profiteer Carruthers'—and she cut me. Imagine it!"

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"Is her acquaintance valuable to you?"

"No. But I've always been nice to her, Rameses," she said, rather pathetically.

She got up, went to the window and looked out. There were a number of children in the street playing, but there were no soiled women in mobcaps to be seen. The prospect was not unpleasant, but it was not like Seventy-eighth street. To his surprise she turned suddenly and faced him.

"Rameses," she said quickly, "do you think any one I know could have recognized me coming out of your rooms that night?"

He took a pace toward her.

"Cherry! You don't mean that you think somebody—"

"I don't know. I'm just asking you. There's an undercurrent I can't explain. Perhaps it's just an instinct. But a bit of gossip like that travels like the wind."

"Oh, I can't believe that. Has any one spoken of it?"

"No, no one would—except 'Genie perhaps—I'd be the last person in the world to hear—except you. It would be funny, Rameses, wouldn't it, if people tagged a thing like that—*on us*?" She laughed constrainedly. "It's too absurd. I used to do that sort of thing—not visiting men's rooms at night exactly—but things that looked just as bad and people talked, of course. But I didn't care. I try to think I don't care now,

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but somehow what people would say now seems so much more significant. I feel that a lot of people would like to think I was crooked if they could and give a dog a bad name—”

“Cherry! Enough of this!” He had taken a stride and caught her by the wrist. “You’re morbid. You’re letting your imagination play hob with your reason. You can’t go on bucking the world in this mood or you’ll end in disaster.”

She released herself and turned away.

“Yes. That’s just it,” she muttered. “I’d like to give them something real to talk about.”

He stared at her careless back for a moment and then turned away toward the mantel. Perhaps she had expected to taunt him into a reply but his silence had a deeper meaning than any verbal protest and in a moment she turned.

“Now, I’ve disappointed you,” she said. And as he still made no reply, “I suppose I have. But I can’t help it. That’s the way I feel. I’m tired of being good—*sick* of it. I’d like to go on the loose—and I will, if I find out that people are trying to drag me down for something I didn’t do.”

“You’re talking like a fool,” he muttered. “Nobody is trying to drag you down. You’re dreaming. Nobody could know—nobody could possibly know—”

“Perhaps—” she said with a shrug. “I don’t care.”

“You *do* care,” he growled savagely. “You *do* care.”

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"No, I don't—I turned my back on public opinion when it didn't matter. I can still turn it, now that it does."

"And your pride?" he asked distinctly.

But she only threw her cigarette into the fire and laughed. The thread of communion was broken. It seemed as though she meant to hurt him or at the least was indifferent to his hurts. It was not so much what she said as what she neglected to say. It was as though she had come to the confessional only to objugate the priest. At least that was how David Sangree thought of her. He wanted to say something to help but somehow the words would not come. For the first time that he could remember he and Cherry were at odds.

"Come," she said at last in a tone of matter-of-fact, "we must be going."

She led the way down into the small hallway, where David Sangree went before her to open the door. His face was set in stern lines but he said nothing more.

Suddenly she thrust out a hand to him.

"I'm a little beast, Rameses. Tell me that I am!"

"No," he said, touching her fingers lightly and releasing them.

"You'll try to think well of me?"

"I've never thought anything else," he finished gravely as he opened the door. And in a moment they were in the street.

## CHAPTER XVII

### LITTLE IRONIES

**T**HE house in One Hundred and Eighty-second Street was small, the neighborhood somewhat as the despairing Alicia had pictured it, but the removal of the Mohun family from its luxurious surroundings had been accomplished without mishap. If her mother took an attitude of silent preoccupation and Bob was outspoken as to what he called "a fool proceeding," Cherry met the situation with an outward aspect of complacency. To her the Seventy-eighth Street house was haunted by a thousand gay memories which she wished to dispel. It would be easier, she thought, to meet the world on even terms in an atmosphere which would be a continual reminder of her new responsibilities. Alicia Mohun, of course, suffered in the comparative discomfort of the "stuffy" rooms, and of the small bathroom which she was now obliged to share with others, and her sensitive soul writhed at the sight of the cheerless wall paper, the mantels of golden oak, the obvious quality of the slop-pails in the yards, the gross familiarity of the underwear of the neighborhood which she could see from her bedroom window. The sounds, sights and smells alike offended her. They belonged to a world which she had long ago forsworn. Bob growled constantly but Cherry



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paid little attention to him. John Chichester, at her mother's request, had found him a job in a broker's office down town and she saw nothing of him all day and little at night. Often she noticed the odor of alcohol about him and talked with him kindly but he only laughed at her fears or evaded her with a shrug. Misfortune seemed to have made more definite the difference between them. No more than their mother had he found it possible to adapt himself to the new conditions.

Cherry had settled into her niche without comment of any kind. Indeed, had she been disposed to criticize on her own account, she was constantly disarmed by the peevish disparagement of her mother to whose moods she could not give encouragement. Cherry's one sanctuary from her other tribulations was with her father. Except for a slight difficulty with one of his legs, which he overcame by the use of a cane, and an occasional weakness which made periods of rest necessary, he seemed to be slowly winning his way back to life. If he suffered physically in any way he made no mention of it and, though Cherry knew that his thoughts must at times be painful, his attitude toward her and toward them all confirmed the impression that he had made in that interview when he had spoken as though with an inward vision in the voice of authority which his wife had not been able to deny. His face was gray and still a trifle drawn, but in his eyes and on his brow was a calmness that seemed to belong to a state of mind which was superior to their change of fortune,

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Indeed, he reflected a quiet courage which put them all to shame, as though, with Cherry, he could be most content in meeting the rigors of the situation face to face. And there was something else in his new attitude toward life which his daughter could not understand—a quiet confidence in himself and in the future. At times his idealism alarmed her. It had a spiritual quality like that of a person near death, and the beauty of his face attenuated by his disease had some of the aspects of immateriality. If he had any regrets he expressed none. He just sat most of the day gazing out of his window at the brick houses opposite in an attitude of deep meditation. Sometimes Cherry noticed on his lips a thin smile which seemed to be turned inward upon himself as though at the shadow of an irony which was not altogether personal. She could not dispel from her mind the impression that if life had dealt him a cruel blow and passed him by, he had emerged from the ordeal a finer creature than he had gone into it. Cherry adored him—he, her. Neither had known how much before their calamity had performed this act of revelation for them.

Perhaps as the days went on it was this newly revived affection which, almost without their being aware of it, caused a feeling of alienation from the two other members of the family. For Alicia Mohun spent most of her time in her own bedroom at those mysterious rites before the mirror which she now performed more diligently than ever. It was astonishing to Cherry, familiar as she was with the workings of Alicia's mind, how

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little her mother's face showed the scars of her misfortune. In the mornings, sometimes, she looked older than her forty-one years, but then Cherry remembered that she had always done that. It was in the afternoon when she emerged from her room for a drive with Mrs. Heywood, or with John Chichester (for curiously enough he still continued his attentions to Cherry's mother), that she looked as ravishingly pretty as ever. There was then no wrinkle to be seen upon the smooth enamel, which she tinted now so artfully that one could almost swear the color came and went, giving her small regular features an aspect of undying youth. There were faint shadows at her eyes, of course, but plaintive ones, slightly tinged with melancholy, as though sorrow had touched her delicately for fear of marring so perfect a thing.

Jim Mohun watched his wife with steadily appraising eyes as she passed perfunctorily through his room coming and going. There was no doubt in Cherry's mind that he felt sorry for her, but his pity had none of the qualities of self-deprecation which Alicia might have expected from it. Something had happened to the soul of her husband which seemed intangibly to put him beyond her reach. In helplessness he had gathered strength—in weakness, power. She couldn't understand. With a genius for the positive uses of prosperity she was helpless in misfortune—which was negative and intangible. And while she secretly resented the change in their fortunes which had robbed her of her initiative, she acquiesced in the wishes that he expressed,

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aware that, if personally distasteful to her, they were not unreasonable. She had been startled at the calmness of his demands that afternoon when he had told her that they must move uptown, shocked into silence when he had told her that her jewels must be sold. They were her jewels, of course, but then, Jim Mohun had given them to her. It was an ill, a dying man perhaps who made the request. She had agreed because, as he put it to her, there was nothing else to be done, but the sense of her martyrdom was no less great because of the necessity for it.

Even had he been indifferent to the subtle influences about him, Jim Mohun could not be unaware of the change in their relations. At times, in mind, in spirit, husband and wife were as far apart as though they had never known each other. Then it was that Cherry saw the rueful smile twist Jim Mohun's lips. Had they ever known each other? Each had always been so busy at his own pursuits! There had never been a great deal of time of late years for even the little amenities of married life. He had been proud of her beauty and her skill, she of his industry and growing power. But now he had fallen, dragging her down, and she had had few words of comfort for him—only tears, regrets, and, at the worst of her nerve attacks, recriminations. It was little wonder that her beauty, the tricks of which he knew, had less meaning for him now, her indifference, more. So it was that the quality of his pity was tempered with bitterness which crept into his look and tone.

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As the days went on Cherry noticed that he put his disappointment in her mother's insufficiency behind him. He gained in strength daily, his jaw took a firmer angle, and his brows were tangled in thought. There was something constructive now in his attitude toward life. His family felt it, though they could not see why they should begin to hope. But Bob, who treated his mother rather badly if he happened to be out of humor, now learned the meaning of his father's sharp look of reproof or the decision in his quiet tones. They awed him a little, for here was a man who had come back from the dead—in a new guise with which Bob was unfamiliar. As the sick man gained in strength and reached a physical condition which would warrant his taking up the thread of affairs, men came to One Hundred and Eighty-second Street, by appointment, to visit him. Geoffrey Towne, the Trustee, Henry J. McCready, Vice-President of the Cosmos Trust Company representing the Chichester interests, George Lycett with friendly offers of which the sick man availed himself.

Some one has said that, if any one has something in himself that others haven't, the world will make a beaten path to his door. No one except a constructive genius could have succeeded as Jim Mohun had done. True, he had failed—but not until after he had succeeded—and only under pressure of abnormal conditions. A bad failure, but an honest one. As the news was carried down town that Jim Mohun had made a brave fight and was pulling through, men remembered him

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with kindness, and wished him well. Other men, his business associates, with ambitious plans which needed a directing hand came seeking him for advice; John Barnett, a former director of the unfortunate Textile Mills Company, with an idea of buying a plant in the Kensington district of Philadelphia; Harvey Matthison of Pittsburgh, a friend of earlier days, who believed that with health Jim Mohun might still rise again.

These visits were very encouraging to Cherry, if only because they enabled her father to resume his touch with the world. But, much as she believed in him, it scarcely seemed possible that they could result in any immediate financial return to add to their slender means which as she figured would be exhausted before the beginning of the next winter. And so meanwhile, as she found the opportunity, she went down town looking for work. As she had told David Sangree, her peace of mind depended, as it had always done, upon the high speeds at which she moved. And it was better to be hunting for a job and be refused, than to sit as her mother did bemoaning her fate. Sangree tried to help her, enlisting the aid of George Lycett and one or two of his other friends and relatives in trying to find something that she could do.

But Cherry was now to make the astonishing discovery that, in spite of all the money that had been spent upon her education, she knew very little indeed. At her finishing school they had taught her that ladies always wrote an angular hand (rather stylish), but, in Cherry's case, little more than an illegible scrawl.

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Her smattering of French, her smattering of the piano were of little value now. She didn't even know enough to play at the movies. Her English was passable but instinctive. Her arithmetic had never been impressive. Any sixteen-year-old graduate of a business school was better equipped than she. Twelve dollars a week was the best offer that she could get—as a saleswoman—behind the counter at a large department store. Cherry's hopes had soared higher than this and she realized with dismay how little fifty dollars a month would contribute to the common store of money in the little household. She must do better than that, much better—a hundred a month at least. But how? She kept the secret of her disappointments from her father who might, she thought, disapprove of her efforts. She visited some of the matrons of society, wealthy women, who had asked her to their parties. They greeted her warmly.

“Why, Cherry, you dear child. So glad to see you!”

But when, in matter-of-fact terms, she explained the object of her visit and expressed a hope that she might find a position as social secretary to some one, they merely recommended that she call on Mrs. So-and-So. They always seemed to be just on the point of going out and in a great hurry—not to be rid of her exactly, but to suggest possibilities elsewhere. The impression that they sought to convey was that they were very kind but very busy. And they rather overdid their parts.

At times Cherry grew desperate. There were many moments like that which she had shown David Sangree

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when the pendulum would have made a wild swing if she hadn't had it under control. Several times she called up Sangree and they had some walks along the riverside. He was patient with her and so nicely balanced between seriousness and jest that he met her moods, bringing her out of the deeps of despair into the shallows of humor where he held her with a reasonable philosophy. She had flashes of bitterness which he bore with a shrug or else with sternness, but having given vent to her feelings she was always contrite and repentant. His was still the avuncular attitude and to his credit it may be said that Cherry never knew how deeply he cared or how keenly he was watching her.

'Genie Armitage more than once took her past some moments of deadening discouragement by carrying her off bodily to some gayety or other, several times to luncheon and a matinée. It was 'Genie who came to her rescue one morning when a position in a publishing office upon which she had set her hopes was filled by a clever little snub-nosed chit in a Russian blouse with her hair still down her back. It seemed that the silly giggle of the fortunate child was the measure of Cherry's incapacity. She was ashamed. Nothing that had happened to her before had so much lowered her in her own estimation. This was an impartial judgment of the world upon her inefficiency. She was useless—fit only for the career for which her mother had reared her—marriage. She was an excrescence on the great body of society, a parasite, with neither brains nor talents to make her way alone. It was a crucial mo-



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ment and 'Genie met it with an invitation to an afternoon at the Wetherill's country place in the Pocantico Hills. Sylvia had asked for her especially and all the old crowd was going to be there. The alternative was a gloomy afternoon in her room face to face with her impotence, so Cherry accepted. In the mood of the moment she would have married any man who asked for her.

Sylvia's welcome and the pleasant familiar faces of the old crowd were balm to her wounds; Gloria Towne, Phoebe Macklin and one or two other girls. Dicky Wilberforce, Horace Galbraith, Teddy Waring, Jack Spencer. It was good to see them all together again. Almost she was ready to believe that she had never been away from them.

Dicky was quite sober and now professed himself to be a person with serious ideas of life. He had actually gone into business. Was this true? Dear old Dicky! How many times was it that he had proposed to her? Fifteen—? She had used to keep count. She looked at him with a new interest, for he seemed to have taken a new stature, a new brightness by contrast to the shadows of her own troubles. He had always been handsome, joyous, picturesque, and to-day his sober pretensions became him. If he asked her to marry him for the sixteenth time, Cherry vowed that she would accept him.

He lost no moments in bringing about a resumption of their friendship and led her forth from the

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squash court, where Teddy and Jack were violently hurling to and fro, into the quiet loggia at the side of the house, a place propitious for confidences. The afternoon was balmy, the foliage already sending forth its tendrils at the first breath of spring—altogether a time ideal for the renewal of old affections. Cherry held her breath. It was a moment tense with expectations, with possibilities. . . .

Dicky spoke in a lowered tone, his lips twisted in the old familiar boyish smile.

"You know how much I've always cared for you, Cherry," he began.

"Yes, Dicky, I do."

"Well, I have. I do still. There isn't another girl just like you and I guess you know by this time that I'll always think of you as one of the best friends I've got in the world."

"I—I'm glad of that, Dicky."

"Well, I've been an awful rotter at times—you know, drinking—and I don't blame you for not having wanted me. You were perfectly right. But I *have* taken a brace. I suppose it's because it isn't so easy to get as it was. And I don't really think about it at all. Haven't touched a drop for a month."

"That's fine of you, Dicky."

"I thought you'd like to know because you did use to tell me I ought to stop. It was Phoebe that made me—"

"Phoebe—!"

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"Yes. 'I suppose *she* ought to tell you, but then we're all good pals, aren't we, Cherry, just the way we used to be?"

"Of course," gasped Cherry, "but what—?" She paused as comprehension slowly came to her.

"Oh, I say, Cherry," he said, "I wanted to be the first to tell. I guess Phoebe wants it too." And then with an awkward gesture—"Oh, hang it all, Cherry. Phoebe and I are engaged!"

"You and—and Phoebe!"

The words came in a jerky whisper as though forced from her against her will. But in a moment she was congratulating him quietly. These are the things a woman does so well. He took her felicitations with the embarrassed grin of a boy who has just won the prize in a spelling bee.

And Cherry, wearing a ballet dancer's smile presently sought out Phoebe, embracing her after the manner of their kind, with quiet expressions of pleasure at the information. If she had been too effusive Phoebe might have guessed the truth. Cherry was too clever—and too proud—to let that happen.

"I'm so glad you approve, darling," said Phoebe gently. "I know Dicky proposed to you every Saturday for weeks. But *I* don't care. He's a nice boy. I'm going to take a chance."

But the day was spoiled for Cherry. It seemed so strange that the thing should have happened just at this time when . . . Phoebe and Dicky. . . . Lucky though that neither of them guessed what had been in

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her thoughts. That would have been rather horrible—almost as horrible as the feeling that everything was against her—everything failing her. . . .

‘Genie drove her to town in Mrs. Gartley’s run-about. Cherry was silent. Aside from Dicky’s confidences, there was a subtle change in her relationships with the old crowd. Everything was different somehow. Already they talked of things with which she was unfamiliar—light gossip about people she didn’t even know—anecdotes—which once would have greatly amused her, and which now had no flavor to arrest the soberness of her thoughts. She couldn’t understand. . . .

“What do you think of Phoebe and Dicky?” she asked after a while.

“Oh, all right, I suppose. They just drifted into it. Phoebe would have liked to marry Jack, and everybody knows that Dicky wanted you. I like Phoebe’s courage though.”

“I think they’ll be happy,” said Cherry quietly. “I want them to be.”

“It’s up to Dicky. But his reformation is a little too sudden to be above suspicion.”

Cherry made no reply and ‘Genie rattled on, aware of Cherry’s mood of abstraction, covering in her blithe way almost the entire philosophy of her precocious youth. She and Cherry had many troubles in common.

“I tell you, Cherry,” she went on after a particularly bitter attack upon her divorced parents for their

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desertion of her, "people that bring girls like us into the world have a lot to be accountable for. I didn't ask to be born—least of all a girl—and I certainly didn't expect after I *was* born to be cast out into rough water without even the benefit of a life preserver. How can creatures like you and me expect to earn a living? I don't even know what six times nine are. I never did. I always said seventy-two and I always will. In private schools they always gave us passing marks in exams because they wanted us to come back next year. But things don't work that way out in the world. I never wanted to be a highbrow but—good Lord! I ought to know something. I don't—except how to dance and flirt. Stripped down to its bare bones the fact is this: I'm just a female of the species sent out into the world to find an accommodating male. It's rather disgusting when you come to think of it—"

"It is," said Cherry soberly, "especially when they try to ram him down your throat."

"But marriage is what you and I were trained for—from the moment we were out of our cradles. If you and I were out on the street we couldn't be more dependent than Aunt Harriet," she said with a shrug, "who marries one rich husband after another. She can't love 'em *all*. She doesn't. You and I know a dozen like her. Which is worse? To sell your body for luxuries like Aunt Harriet or to sell it because you've got to live—like the streetwalker? I tell you, Cherry, I've been doing a lot of thinking about things.

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They all expect me to marry money. But I'm not going to. I'm going to marry the man I can help and for love or I'm not going to marry at all."

"'Genie! you angel child! You almost make me believe that you care for some one."

"No, I don't. I'm just talking. But the men they want us to marry are all wrong. You know—animated bean poles like Willie Rossiter. Imagine little me going down the aisle with Willy. We'd look like Rhode Island and Texas.—Or Stevie Delano—blond, rosy and moist. I hate a man who perspires easily. I always think what an awful stew he'd get into if I gave him something to perspire about. Oh, yes—and there's another—you haven't met him—Nat Bachelor from Indianapolis—rich as Croesus, darling, and exactly the color and proportions of a meal worm." She gave a dry laugh. "Not for me. I haven't a dollar of my own, but I'm not going to marry any of that lot. Imagine sitting at the breakfast table and watching Willy's Adam's apple wiggle every time he swallowed. It's a little thing not to get married for, but there it is."

"I know," said Cherry with a grin. "I felt that way. John Chichester's mustache."

"Exactly. I'd like really to love somebody, Cherry. Really I would. But it seems to me that the man I want must be doing something besides going to teas and jazz parties. I guess he's somewhere. Working probably—trying to do something—be something. Maybe he'll turn up sometime."

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"Maybe he will. I hope he will, 'Genie—"

"It's just my luck to fall in love with some poor honest gink without a prospect in the world and live in New Jersey. I always wanted to 'mother' somebody—somebody—well, like David Sangree for instance——"

"Rameses!"

"Well—er—you know what I mean—a fellow with a serious purpose whose life means something—"

"'Genie, do you mean that you——?"

"No, I don't mean anything," 'Genie broke in quickly. "I'm not in love with him in the least. He just represents the type I mean. But I do like David Sangree tremendously."

"Oh," said Cherry thoughtfully.

"Funny, isn't it? Dad was strong for fuzzy blondes and mother—well, mother liked to go to a leg show and eat chocolates. I've got an uncle who dotes on dancing with débutantes and you know what Aunt Harriet is. Funny! I wonder where I got that serious strain."

"Do—do you think Dr. Sangree cares for you?"

"Bless your heart! He hasn't said so. I don't want him to tempt me, I might marry him whereas I know that my duty lies with Willy and his Adam's apple. Both Eve and Helen of Troy got in wrong because of apples. And I may have to fall for Willy's."

"'Genie! You're too absurd," Cherry laughed gayly the first time that day.

"I am. That's because laughing and making people laugh is one way of keeping from crying. I tell

## LITTLE IRONIES

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you there's some meaning to things," she said almost fiercely, "that I'll never get out of the life I live—something quiet but gorgeous, like—er—like a September sunset."

"Spiritual—" muttered Cherry. It was a word David Sangree had sometimes used.

"Yes, that's it. I tell you, Cherry, I'm sick of the things I've been doing, nothing but eating and jazzing—as if human beings were nothing but stomachs and feet!" she finished scornfully.

Cherry was silent for a moment, her lips curling. And then—

"I guess if you'd been doing what *I* have, you might want a little of that," she said ruefully.

'Genie put a hand over hers impulsively. "You poor dear! I forgot. Perhaps I would. But I don't know. I'm sick of it all—sick of it. Perhaps it's because I've had too much. Aunt Harriet makes me go to everything. She says it's for the honor of the family to be popular. I feel as though I were being driven. Lucky I'm strong. Poor Vi couldn't stand the pace. I told you they'd taken her up into the woods, didn't I? And Jane Darley is down with nervous prostration—trained nurse and everything—and all over nothing—giving the best part of our lives to that sort of thing when we ought to be trying to do something!" She laughed dryly. "Oh, it's all so damned silly."

Cherry made no comment and 'Genie fell into silence, both absorbed in their thoughts. But as they approached the city Cherry spoke.



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"Did you really mean what you said about David Sangree?" she asked.

"Why shouldn't I?" replied 'Genie carelessly, and gave Cherry no further satisfaction.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### NEW VENTURES

**C**HERRY left 'Genie's runabout at the Avenue on the plea of need for the exercise of the walk across town. What she really wanted before she went indoors was a few moments alone in which to recapitulate her spiritual assets and discover how much or how little the defection of Dicky Wilberforce meant to her. She had never been in the least in love with Dicky, but it had been a shock to discover that she couldn't marry him now whether she wanted him or not. It had been a greater shock to learn how easily he had managed to forget her. For he had been rather imposing to-day in his sober new guise of fiancé and man of the world! She resented it a little that Phoebe had accomplished his reformation where Cherry had failed. But then he was rather splendid in his new halo, with the handsome Phoebe ready "to take a chance." Phoebe hadn't wasted a great deal of time since Cherry had disappeared from the social scene.

Cherry had left the Wetherill's with a sense of relief. It had been very kind of Sylvia to invite her out with the old crowd, but the acceptance of the invitation had only impressed more deeply on Cherry's mind the differences which now existed between their life and hers. She had gone to the country trying to forget her fail-

## *THE HOUSE OF MOHUN*

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ures and had only added one more discouragement to them.

And 'Genie! What had 'Genie meant by all that sentimental stuff about David Sangree? For a long while Cherry had been thinking of Rameses as her particular property, her creature, her refuge in time of need, the one of all the people that she knew who could be most surely relied upon to pull her out of the slough of despair—and here was 'Genie talking lightly of "mothering" somebody with serious purposes in life—preferably Cherry's friend David. And 'Genie was quite capable of doing anything upon which she set her mind. Did Rameses care for 'Genie? If so, why hadn't he said something about it to Cherry? Every association—every friendship—was excluding her. She seemed to be as useless in the cosmic scheme as a tea card sent to the wrong address. Even Bruce Cowan, who had pursued her with such avidity in the days of her prosperity, had not been to the new house. She chose to forget his hot-blooded proposal of marriage and the coolness that had followed it—the meetings in which he had laid her on a level with his own animalism. 'Genie had told her that he had given up selling "Magnificent Motors" and was now engaged in the motion picture business—though what his position, she did not know. 'Genie had never liked Bruce and Cherry had been forced to admit that 'Genie's judgment of people was sometimes better than her own.

'Genie and Rameses! That was funny. She would

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question Rameses about 'Genie . . . and 'Genie about Rameses. . . .

The next morning's household work seemed to bring her no nearer to the solution of these problems. She paused for a moment after rinsing out a shirt waist and went to the open window of the bathroom, looking down upon the endless row of back yards, the sight of which her mother so greatly disliked. There were people moving here and there, slovenly-looking women in calico, about their daily tasks. Cherry had never thought very much about her neighbors. The difficulties which faced her had been more than enough to fill her mind, but now in this idle moment of healthful reaction a phrase of David's came to her—"the greatest game in the world—when the odds are against you—life itself." She had caught his meaning vaguely as something different from the joys of her careless youth. Life! It had another meaning—something hidden deep below the surface of illusory pleasures—she heard it from her small window in the throb of the city, the distant tapping of a riveter's air hammer, the roar of the L, the groan of a motor horn, the complaint of the clanging bells of the surface cars, and nearer at hand, in the rasp of a saw, the rattle of dishes, nasal voices raised in argument, sounds which indicated various forms of activity within a hundred feet of her, repeated in diminishing notes all down the length of the block—each house with its own problems, each family, each unit of each family, struggling with

## THE HOUSE OF MOHUN

the others for existence. This was what David had meant when he had spoken of the greatest game in the world—hers now, to play as those others played it, asking no favors, getting none. . . . There must be others about her who had failed as she had failed and yet they still persisted, they still hoped, still struggled. . . .

A voice came clearly from an open window, a feminine voice, singing a popular air in a thin but not unpleasant nasal soprano. It was a happy voice, full of the aspirations of youth and joy and somehow it gave Cherry a sense of confraternity in the great fellowship of those who played the Game.

In the back yard, where she went after a moment to hang out the things she had been washing, she heard a voice almost beside her. The yellow head of a girl was nodding at her over the low, wooden fence in a friendly way.

"Hello!" said the girl.

"Hello!" said Cherry. "Was that you singing?"

The yellow head bobbed. "What a pretty shirt waist! I wash mine too. Ain't the laundries a mess?"

"It's very little trouble," said Cherry. And then, "Have you been living here long?"

"Oh, yes—a couple of years. The family has. I've been away—out to the Coast—until last week."

"Oh."

"I'm in pictures—small parts. What's your line?"

"My line?" Cherry smiled dubiously. "I haven't any line. That is, I haven't any job. I wish I had."

The yellow head bobbed vigorously. Its shade was

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too yellow to be above suspicion and the face beneath it, though very youthful, showed the slight unevennesses in texture which comes from the constant use of cosmetics. But her eyes were of a dark gray and were singularly earnest.

"Say! Ain't it fierce to be out of a job when you need it—getting deeper in the hole all the time!" She broke off, "But I guess you've never been as near down and out as we have."

"Well—I don't know how near down and out you've been," said Cherry curiously. She had approached the fence and leaned against it. The girl's frankness and self-confidence interested her. She had a friendly smile which showed dimples and pretty teeth, very white and even.

"Good Lord! I don't like to think of it now that things are coming my way. Not a dollar in the house for weeks at a time and no sign of any. You don't look as if you'd even been hungry. Well, that's what I mean. . . ."

"No," said Cherry, slowly, "I've never been hungry."

"Well—it ain't pleasant." There was a pause. And then, "Say, you're awfully pretty," said the girl. "When did you 'bob' your hair?"

"Oh, two years ago."

"Why did you? You must have had a lot of it. Nix on the Greenwich Village stuff for mine! I need my mop in my business. It lights up great when it's waved. Mary hasn't anything on me."

"I think your hair is very lovely," said Cherry.

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"Do you? I'm glad. Say, what's your name? Mine's Effie Burdette—Meadowcroft Pictures, Limited—"

"My name is Margot Mohun. But people call me Cherry."

"Cherry! Say—that's a swell name for pictures. Have you ever had a 'test' made?"

"No. What's a 'test'?"

"Just a few hundred feet of 'flim' to see what you can do—what you look like."

"Oh! No, I haven't."

Effie laughed, "Well, you can take it from me you never know what you look like until you see yourself 'flimmed.' You might be all right, though. Haven't you ever thought of trying?"

"No."

"Well, I guess you're about the only girl in the U. S. A. who hasn't."

"Do you like the pictures?" asked Cherry.

"Like them? Oh, yes. But they ain't any pipe—at first. It takes a lot of work to learn—watching the stars—getting the technic. But I'm pretty good. I get a salary now. I may get a lead next year."

"Oh, I hope you will. And of course it pays enormously—"

"Not me, it doesn't—not enormously—but I'm satisfied. I'm coming on. I get enough to keep this outfit going O. K."

Cherry turned to her in surprise.

"You mean that you support your whole family?"

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"Sure thing. Have a fag?"

She brought out a paper of cigarettes and offered them to Cherry, who took one. This young creature had captured her interest and now engaged her respect.

"Haven't you a father," asked Cherry, when she had taken a light from the girl's cigarette.

"Down and out. He was a house painter—fell off a ladder three years ago and twisted his spine—"

"And your mother?"

"Ma! She's blind in one eye and can't see out of the other. Got the asthma bad too." She gave a short laugh at the ash of her cigarette. "Ain't we the helluva mess!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry!"

"Ma used to fuss around the kitchen some but she mistook some soap fat for stock one day and liked to have poisoned us all with the soup. We've got a girl now."

The cheerful tone in which this catalogue of calamities was delivered bewildered her listener.

"But all this responsibility must have been very terrible for you," said Cherry genuinely.

"It was—some. But then, what could I do? There they are—helpless. I couldn't lay down on the job. Could I?"

Cherry realized with a keen sense of self-reproach that this was just what she herself had yesterday been on the point of doing.

"I hate a quitter, don't you?" Effie went on "There were times when I was pretty near down and



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out and it looked like the curtains for Effie—or an Angel. But then every time I went out to dinner with a man and ate a lot of rich food, I got to thinking about what was in the refrigerator at home—and about Pa's sore back. Funny, ain't it?"

"I—think—I understand," said Cherry slowly. "You're wonderful."

"Oh, no. But I know my way about in this little burg. Say, Cherry, maybe I could help you to get a 'test'—you don't mind my calling you Cherry, do you?"

"No. I'm glad you did, Effie. We're next-door neighbors. We ought to be friends."

"Surest thing you know. How old are you?"

"Twenty."

"I'm twenty-three."

When girls truthfully tell each other their ages they are in a fair way of becoming intimate. This acquaintance made over the back fence was the beginning of a relationship which was to bloom rapidly into friendship. As Cherry was soon to discover, Effie Burdette had many admirable qualities, not the least of which were her loyalty and her sincerity—and having given of her friendship to Cherry she was not one to withdraw it without a cause. And Cherry, who had already learned many things not imparted to her at Mrs. Par-ton's select boarding school, met her advances with a sense of privilege, aware of the fineness of the motives which had kept this girl straight in the midst of perilous temptations—for it was not long before she told

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Cherry most of them. In her turn Cherry gave her the history of the Mohun family and the necessities to which it had been reduced, at which Effie was deeply impressed and highly commiserative, for, having suffered, she had a limitless capacity for sympathy. Cherry visited the Burdette household and met the shut-ins, and, much to Mrs. Mohun's dismay, Effie spent some evenings with Cherry.

"I can't imagine, Cherry," said Alicia one morning at the breakfast table after one of these visits, "how, with your training, you could possibly be friendly with such a dreadful creature as that."

"I like her," said her daughter calmly.

"But, my dear, surely you can see that she isn't your kind at all. There is no reason, even now, why you should not make friends of your own sort."

"Where? How? I'm very proud of her friendship, Muzzy. She's a wonderful girl."

"Really!"

When Alicia said "really" in just that soft tone Cherry knew that she meant it to be equivalent to a last word in objurgation. But it only made the hair prickle aggressively at the back of Cherry's neck.

"Yes," she asserted warmly. "You may not like the way she talks but she's the pluckiest girl I ever knew—and a lady, every inch of her."

"I hadn't observed it," replied Alicia calmly. And then, as she arose from the table, "Of course, if you choose to go to her house or to meet her outside, I

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can't prevent you, but as for having her here in the parlor in the evenings where my friends are likely to be visiting, I must positively forbid it."

Cherry frowned into her coffee cup. But she knew what her mother feared—a meeting between the plebeian Effie and the ineffable John Chichester! She gulped her coffee quickly to swallow the scorn that rose in her throat. But fortunately her mother left the room at once.

The immediate result of this friendship between the girls was Cherry's visit with Effie to meet Mr. Edward McKaigh, the director of the local studios of the Meadowcroft Company. Within the huge building, which had once been a factory, Effie led her with a pert nod of the head past the watchful doorkeeper up a flight of shabby stairs, through dark corridors from which they suddenly emerged into the confusion of the main studio. The garish blue-white lights of the Cooper-Hewettes glared in her eyes, blinding her for a moment as she stood where the businesslike Effie placed her while she went in search of the man they sought. Beside Cherry people passed to and fro, their faces grotesque in makeup, perspiring men in shirt sleeves carried furniture here and there, while carpenters just beside her were building a set. The unfamiliar clicking of a battery of cameras persisted above all smaller sounds and Cherry moved forward a few paces to look at the actors, aware of the strident voice of a sub-director giving excited instructions—as the cameras ceased clicking.

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"Oh, say, Miss Savage. Do you love this guy or don't you?"

A feeble response from the delinquent.

"Then grab him as if you did. You wanted some emotional stuff and now we've given it to you. Put it over now in this next shot. This other dame, Maisie, is trying to 'vamp' him away from you. Remember that. Now. We'll run the scene over and see how it goes. Don't forget the soul stuff—innocent though—that's what gets him. Understand?"

Cherry felt very sorry for the girl. How she managed to remain free from self-consciousness in such surroundings Cherry could not understand, for a dozen people at least were watching, but she only shrugged lightly and flashed a bright smile at the man who acted with her in the scene. His back had been turned to Cherry but as he moved into a new position as directed she saw that he was Bruce Cowan. He did not see Cherry and she withdrew into the shadow of a canvas set, still watching. He *was* handsome. Miss Savage evidently shared her opinion, for while the "script" was read she glanced at him from time to time when he spoke as though in deference to his opinion.

But before the camera began clicking again Effie came back and led her to the private office of Mr. McKaigh.

"I'm afraid there isn't much hope," Effie whispered on the way. "They're cutting down expenses, and there's only two pictures, mine and this other. But

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we'll see him just the same." And then, in a kind of awed whisper, "Harold Swift is in the office. You'll meet him."

Cherry remembered the name of the famous "lover" of many pictures, thrilling gently as Effie did, and entered the sanctum of the great man with some apprehension. McKaigh was tall and thin, with a hooked nose and a sharp chin. He smiled politely, exhibiting golden teeth.

"And still they come," he said. "Mr. Swift, Miss—er—"

"Mohun," put in Effie.

"Miss Mohun—bobbed hair—um," dubiously. "Too bad! Let's see your profile. Got any photos?"

"No, I didn't bring any."

"Things are very slow, Miss Mohun. Nobody doing anything now—"

"I thought, Mr. McKaigh," said Effie, "you might be willing to give her a test."

"Oh—well, yes, it might be managed. Have you got a minute, Harold?"

Mr. Swift glanced at Cherry through his long eyelashes and then dubiously at his watch. He was a very great person, she knew, and his moments must be very precious.

"Oh, say, Neddy," he said with an abstracted air, "can't you get somebody else?"

"Just five minutes. Effie wants this. Can't refuse Effie. Come along."

He led the way out into the studio with the listless

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Harold, Cherry, greatly disturbed, following with Effie like a lamb to the slaughter. There was little time to spare, but Effie made up Cherry's face while McKaigh gave her her instructions—which were, in brief, to make sentimental advances, finally ending in a “get together” with this lover of many women who stood imperturbably listening, a slight smile of bored condescension upon his lips.

Cherry moved into the place indicated under the glare of the lights with Harold Swift beside her and stood staring at the camera man, aware of the sound of the machine. Other people were looking. Cherry's blood turned to water. She knew that she looked a fool. She was conscious of her hands, of her feet. They were leaden objects which she moved with difficulty. Beside her the magnificent Harold listlessly waited to be intrigued. She put a hand timidly upon his shoulder and looked up into his face. He put his arm around her, bending forward. “More pep,” he whispered kindly. She tried to think of Effie and all that she had done for her, but the sound of the clicking camera exorcized all ease, all grace.

In the “close-ups” which followed she tried to smile, to show pathos, to indicate varying emotions. Had she been asked to cry she would probably have done so, because she knew that she was a failure.

She read it in Effie's flustered face, in McKaigh's blank expression, in the bored look of the camera man, in Harold Swift's sudden exit from the scene when his share in the little comedy was finished.

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"No experience," was McKaigh's verdict. "A year or two in stock is what you need, Miss Mohun," he said kindly. "But you can come around to the projection room in a few days and see this run off."

Cherry thanked him and went into the dressing room where Effie wiped and washed the grease paint from her face.

She gave Effie a rueful smile.

"I was rotten," she said.

"You were as good as Miss Savage," said Effie loyally. "You can do better. I know you can. But you *were* sorta stiff, Cherry. I was like that at first. You've got to get used to it. You'll be all right the next time."

"I don't believe there will be any next time," said Cherry with a dry laugh.

When they went out of the dressing room Effie left her for a moment to make plans for the following day and Cherry was about to turn into the studio when she met Bruce Cowan face to face. For a moment he did not recognize her, but she spoke his name.

"Hello, Bruce!"

"Well, Cherry! What are you doing here?"

She told him, and the probable results of the experiment. He listened. He had a slightly superior air, not so condescending as Mr. Swift's (which would come later). She felt that he wished her to understand that since they had last met he had become a man of some consequence—to inform her, if she had not

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heard of it, that he was going to make a success of the pictures in which he had a part.

"I've only been doing it for two months. I was with the Circle Company first. They picked me out of the extras and gave me a part. Last week McKaigh saw me work and made me a big offer to come to Meadowcroft. I've only been here a week. But I'm going great. Say, in a few months I'm going to back Harold off the map."

"I'm glad, Bruce. I do hope you'll succeed. You were always too beautiful to sell motors."

The friendly irony passed over his head. He believed that what she said was true.

"Oh, I photograph good. And I always wanted to be an actor. It's dead easy for me. I've got some athletic stuff to do too. We go out to White Plains for that. That's where I put it over Harold."

His egotism was, as ever, colossal, but with this new background of achievement, it was somewhat impressive.

"Miss Savage is very pretty," said Cherry.

"Oh, yes. She's all right, isn't she?" Then with an air of sudden abstraction, "Well, I hope you got a good test." And, as he shook hands, "Say, Cherry, you're looking kind of thin and peaky. Brace up. The first hundred years are the hardest. Well, I've got to be changing. So long."

Cherry watched his diminishing back with mingled feelings. Of the Bruce Cowan that she thought she



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had known the traces were negligible. The most definite impression that he had conveyed was his absorption in a very important and triumphant career. It was also obvious that he had chosen to use that motive as a buffer to repress any tendencies on Cherry's part which might lead toward a recurrence of their sentimental adventure. He might have spared himself that anxiety! The blood rushed hotly to her face as a wave of humiliation swept over her. She saw him with a new physical vision, herself with a new spiritual one. The virility that had always appealed to her, the physical appeal of his bodily perfections . . . they belonged somehow to a past in which she had been actuated by a different set of impulses. His egotism then had been turned outward for her favor—now it was turned inward only for his own. Like Dicky, he renounced her, but here the irony was less subtle but more perfect. She couldn't have Bruce at any price if she wanted him. She was "thin and peaky."

. . . . .  
The result of the test justified Cherry's opinions and Effie's fears. The film was unsatisfactory from every point of view. The emotions registered were spurious. The girl that Cherry saw as she sat, her hand in Effie's, in the dark projection room was like an awkward stranger from the country suddenly thrown upon her own resources in a fashionable drawing-room—all hands and feet. She saw the lips of the graceful Harold form into the words "more pep"—and with pity for this poor creature who was herself, she saw

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that there was no response. The close-ups too were caricatures. Cherry had not known that her cheek bones had become so prominent. She *was* "peaky." And her blue eyes had photographed palely.

"It was the rotten lighting they gave you," whispered Effie.

"No," said Cherry. "I guess I wasn't meant to be a movie queen, Effie."

"I'm so sorry, Cherry. You know I am, don't you?" she said as they went out.

Cherry pressed Effie's hand and laughed. It was the only thing that she could do.

## CHAPTER XIX

### ALICIA REVIVES

**F**ROM the despair with which Alicia Mohun had at first faced their situation, she now assumed an attitude of aggrieved acquiescence in whatever was proposed to her, but she contributed little of advice or encouragement to Cherry's conduct of affairs. It was difficult for Cherry to decide whether the initiative which had been so conspicuous in Alicia's social progress was now lacking by ineptitude or design; whether her talents, developed to master the intricacies of an exotic mode of life, had outgrown primitive conditions or whether the blow to her self-esteem had made her indifferent to the fate of her family. If she had relaxed into that state of indifference typified by dressing sacks, untidiness and supineness, her attitude would have been easier to define. But it was apparent that her vitality had been in no way impaired and that she still clung to the vestiges of her youth with an ardor in no sort abated. To Cherry, the ritual at the dressing-table was now the symbol of an aspiration which, ignoring the wreckage about her, still dwelt among the scenes of her former triumphs.

If Cherry had been disposed to be lenient she would perhaps have thought of her mother as a disappointed

## *ALICIA REVIVES*

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woman still clinging rather hopelessly to the remembrances of success. But the valiant struggle of the man whose name her mother bore, his courage, his belief in himself and his hope in them all, presented more clearly her mother's rather childlike infatuations. She did not mind if Alicia drove out with Mrs. Heywood, or if she went for afternoon tea to the houses of old friends, or if she accepted their invitations to luncheons or the theater. Since she was obviously unhappy within the house, it was better, even if her husband was neglected, that she should go out of it.

But Cherry did resent the attentions of John Chichester, which continued to be as persistent as they were incomprehensible. The facility with which he had transferred them from Cherry to her mother, and Alicia's tacit acceptance of them, led Cherry into bewildering mazes of thought. It was true that John Chichester had never proposed to Cherry. And she realized that it had always been her mother who had cultivated this intimacy as a part of her general campaign for her daughter's social career. Cherry could not believe, even now, that her mother had been actuated by any other purpose. But the frequency of Mr. Chichester's visits and the evident pleasure which each took in the society of the other had become more and more disturbing. At the very least, her mother's heedlessness was undignified and unbecoming; at the most, insensible and disloyal, in spirit, if not in letter, to the sick man. Cherry realized for the first time, with a strange qualm, that her mother was some years younger

## *THE HOUSE OF MOHUN*

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than her visitor, a fact quite evident when they were seen together.

If her father was aware of the thoughts in Cherry's mind he made no comment. He still spent much time in his own room writing, planning or conferring with visitors and seemed to have little time or thought for his wife or her occupations.

Cherry knew that her mother drove out with Mr. Chichester at least once a week; that he was frequently at the house in the afternoons, and she had reason to suspect that her mother sometimes met him elsewhere. But she did not choose to dignify her impatience by recriminations, and when she saw the visitor she made every effort to give him an amiable greeting. No word had ever passed between Chichester and Cherry, either of sentiment or of business, and, with the sudden cessation of his addresses, Cherry had assumed that her mother had made a proper use of her social graces in diverting the current of Chichester's vagrant affections into another channel. The ease with which this had been accomplished, though unflattering to her own self-esteem, had given Cherry a new measure of her mother's adaptability.

The despairing tears which she had shed on Cherry's account no longer flowed. Smiles had soon taken their place. She spoke no more of Cherry's ingratitude. It had seemed to Cherry that Alicia's acquiescence had too many of the elements of contentment to be above suspicion. What did her mother's new attitude mean? What had been the motive of the conversations with Mr.

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Chichester, which had restored her mother to calmness and self-complacency? Her references to Chichester were above criticism, but they opened the door to disturbing queries as to the influences which might have been the cause of his generosity. He had taken up some notes of Mohun and Company which one of the banks had held. And if generous as to this, why not as to the matter of the personal loan which had been the cause of Cherry's rebellion?

The thought of that loan still worried Cherry—more even than her own failures in the struggle for existence. She knew that the money realized from the sale of the pearls had been enough to pay all obligations, and her mother, who had insisted on depositing the sum in her own bank account, had assured her that Chichester's affair "would be attended to." But since her mother now kept her check book and her bank book in a locked drawer, Cherry was forced to be content with that statement.

As Cherry approached the house on her return from her unsuccessful visit to the Meadowcroft Studio, she saw that John Chichester's limousine stood at the door. She met its owner in the small parlor where he sat awaiting her mother. As she entered, he rose, pulling nervously at his wisp of mustache. Her glance passed over his evening clothes which suggested quite plainly their plan of a dinner and theater party for two. Cherry's cool greeting perhaps reflected her disapproval. She had meant to go upstairs at once, but at the door she paused and turned.

## *THE HOUSE OF MOHUN*

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"Oh," she said quietly, "there's something that I've been wanting to speak to you about."

"Ah, Cherry! Is there anything further that I can do?"

It was her imagination of course which emphasized his wish to placate her.

"No, thanks. It isn't anything like that. It's about what you've already done."

"My dear Cherry," he said pleasantly, "I hope you won't give that a thought."

"But I do." She paused a moment searching for words and then, avoiding subterfuge, spoke directly.

"A few months ago my mother borrowed ten thousand dollars from you—"

"No, I loaned it to her, my dear. There's a difference."

"You were very kind. My father and I deeply appreciated your kindness—your other kindnesses to us all. But what I wanted to know was whether or not my mother has repaid it to you?"

Chichester gazed at her a moment half whimsically and then looked away.

"Has that worried you? My dear girl—"

"Answer me, please," insisted Cherry, calmly. "Did she pay you or not?"

"I don't quite see——"

"What affair it is of mine? Perhaps you don't think it is. I do. That money went to pay some of my debts as well as hers. Has she given you anything?"

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"Oh, yes, of course."

"How much?"

"Really, my dear—it's very foolish of you to disturb yourself. She has paid me—er—a substantial sum. What should it matter to you if I am satisfied? As you know I have more money than I—"

"That's not the point, Mr. Chichester," Cherry broke in quickly. "I would be obliged if you'd let me know just how much we owe you—won't you tell me?"

Chichester hesitated. She did not believe him to be by inclination a liar.

"Won't you let this be a matter between Mrs. Mohun and me?"

The purpose of his question was perhaps generous in intention, but he realized immediately that it had an awkward sound and he saw the swift fire that ran through Cherry's eyes.

"You can hardly think," she said coolly, "that I would be willing to believe in an obligation on my mother's part not shared by the rest of her family."

He covered his momentary confusion by a short laugh.

"Oh, I say, Cherry. Aren't you a little severe? Of course there's no obligation—except that of a very warm friendship made more gentle by misfortune."

"Oh, yes, of course," she said with a shrug.

He turned toward her again.

"Won't you let me have the privilege of helping you—of helping you all? It's very little I've done."



## THE HOUSE OF MOHUN

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Wouldn't it be more—er—philosophical to say nothing more about it?"

She paused a moment, thinking.

"Then mother has paid you nothing—" she announced.

"I didn't say that."

"No, but you might as well have."

"Please say no more about it, Cherry."

"I won't, not now. And I thank you for not lying to me."

At this moment there was a sibilance from the stairway outside and Cherry turned to meet her mother. She wore one of the frocks which John Chichester's money had gone to pay for, a new one of black that brought her head into colorful relief. She was more than usually well tinted and, as she came into the room, exhaled delicate odors. Her smile broke languidly.

"So sorry to keep you waiting—oh, Cherry dear, when did *you* get in? I hope you've had a nice day. Mr. Chichester and I are going to dinner and then to 'Mr. F's Aunt.' It's fearfully funny they say—that is, if Mr. Chichester isn't ashamed of being seen with me in this *rag*."

"I've never seen you look more charming—" said Chichester gallantly.

"We won't be late, of course, Cherry. But you needn't bother to wait up for me. I have my key. Good night, darling. Come, Mr. Chichester."

Cherry made a perfunctory response to their fare-

## ALICIA REVIVES

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wells and stared blankly after them, her mind slowly expanding to the significance of this frank declaration of independence. Her mother's artistry had never seemed so admirable, her worldliness so heartless. Nice day indeed! What did her mother care what sort of a day she had had—if *she* could have the things that she craved? This affair was going beyond the bounds of dignity. That money never repaid—not a dollar probably. . . . Cherry almost wished, now that her mother had gone, that she had flung out at her and told her what she thought—anything to have ruffled her carefully preened plumage—made a scene which would have brought recriminations even—sullied the perfect mask with tears of anger or dismay—anything which might have awakened her mother to the realities of the situation and to her sense of duty. . . . Nice day indeed!

Dinner was almost ready and the usual odors came through the open door of the kitchen where the small maid of all work was trying to achieve the impossible task of cooking a palatable dinner in the odd moments between rushing in to finish setting the table. Cherry knew what there was to eat—vegetable soup, pork chops, mashed potatoes and fried tomatoes—for she had bought them herself—cup custard to follow. But she knew, too, how it was all going to taste—exactly as though everything had come from the same pot—and to-night she had no appetite.

She made her way somberly up the stairs to her room. Her father's door was open and she looked in.

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He was standing by the window peering out and listening, it seemed, to the diminishing perspective of sound from John Chichester's car. With an impulse which she couldn't resist she went in and crossed rapidly to him. He heard her footsteps and turned.

"Oh, Cherry dear—" he said calmly and kissed her.

"She spoke to you—?" she asked impulsively. "She told you where she was going?"

He merely shrugged. "Yes," he said, "she told me."

"And you had no objection?" she gasped. "I hadn't meant to speak of this to you, Dad, but it's going too far."

"What is, my dear?"

"Mr. Chichester's attentions. I was on the point of giving Muzzy a piece of my mind."

"I'm glad you didn't—that could have done no good. Let her go—if it makes her happy. I don't need her."

"But don't you realize—? They're seen together constantly, every day. People must be talking."

"Let them," said Mohun with a shrug.

"And you don't care?"

"No," he said calmly, "if he amuses her—for God's sake let him."

His hebetude amazed and shocked her. "People don't know your mother as I do, my dear," he went on calmly. "She's too 'good form' to do anything improper—and too lacking in temperament to want it."

Cherry frowned.

"I don't mean that. I don't know what I do mean

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except that it's unbecoming—undignified—to say nothing of being disloyal—”

“But if I don't care—why should you?”

It was on Cherry's tongue to tell her father of the unpaid loan, for she knew that he knew nothing of this, but she realized that it would only make him unhappy.

“Oh, all right, Dad,” she said, as she went out of the room. “If Muzzy wants to make a fool of herself it's no affair of mine, I suppose.”

But in her heart Cherry was very certain that she did not share her father's indifference. And that night long after the light in her father's room had been put out she sat up darning stockings—very thoroughly but very badly—a baleful fire in her eye as she watched the hands of the clock swing around toward midnight. The disconcerting events of the day with regard to her own fortunes had given her much to think of, but none of them was so much in her thoughts as the selfish effrontery of her mother. What her father said might be true, but Cherry decided that another night should not pass without her mother knowing exactly what her daughter thought of her.

At the sound of the latchkey in the door downstairs Cherry quickly laid aside her work and rose. She meant to give her mother time to say her adieus and then go down to her, so she went to the door of her room and out upon the landing. The sound of voices in suppressed tones came up to her quite distinctly.

“No, you *must* go, Jack—really you must—”

Jack! They were indeed progressing! Cherry

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coughed discreetly but the couple in the hallway did not see or hear her.

"Oh, I say, Alicia. Just a moment. One more kiss, I swear you never were so adorable."

Cherry heard her mother's titter and the sound of it disgusted her. . . . She went down the stairs. They saw her at the same moment and parted quickly.

"Why, Cherry!" gasped Alicia, staring as though at a ghost. "I thought I asked you not to wait up for me."

"I wasn't sleepy," said Cherry calmly. There was something uncompromising in her attitude as she stood a few steps above them awaiting Mr. Chichester's departure. He was not slow to catch its significance, for he spoke in strictly formal tones to her mother.

"Good night. So glad you could go."

"Thank you so much, Mr. Chichester," said Alicia. "Good night."

She closed the street door and then turned facing her daughter. She must have seen the fire burning in Cherry's eyes, but she gave no sign of comprehension.

"You should have gone with us, Cherry—the most amusing thing," she began lightly as she moved toward the stair. "A very ingenious situation in the third act—"

But Cherry on the bottom step did not stir.

"I came down here because I wanted to talk to you, Muzzy," she said quietly.

"Is—is anything wrong, dear?" asked Alicia.

"Perhaps you can best tell me about that."

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"Why, Cherry! What do you mean?"

Cherry went into the parlor where she caught a glimpse of her own face and her mother's, side by side, in the mirror over the mantel. The shadows of weariness which had recently been growing about Cherry's eyes had deepened. To a casual observer Alicia might have seemed younger than her daughter.

"Just this," said Cherry quietly. "I saw Mr. Chichester for a moment before you left. He told me that you had not repaid that loan."

She saw her mother's lips close in a thin line which eliminated all the charm of their pretty curves, and her eyes grow suddenly metallic.

"Well," she said coolly, "and what of that?"

"There was money enough to have repaid it at first. You told me that you would attend to it."

"Doesn't it occur to you, my dear, that I'm quite capable of looking after my own affairs?"

"If it *was* your affair only! But it isn't. That money went to pay my bills as well as yours—it isn't your affair only. It's Dad's—and mine."

"How? I borrowed it. It's my obligation. Your father knows nothing about it. Why should you worry so long as Mr. Chichester is satisfied?"

"I worry just as Dad would—if he knew."

Alicia's brows drew together pettishly. "Is there any need to tell him?"

Alicia was aware of a doubt which had come into her daughter's averted eyes.

"I don't want to. I don't want to worry him. He's

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had enough already." She turned suddenly to her mother, her blue eyes alight with her frank appeal. "Muzzy—how much of that money is there left? How much have you paid John Chichester? Won't you tell me?"

Alicia turned to the mirror and toyed with a rebellious curl.

"I've paid him something. He wouldn't let me pay him any more. He was very considerate. He thought that we would need it. God knows we do."

"But not charity, Muzzy—not his or any one's—"

"Charity! Really, Cherry. You amaze me. I don't know what has got into you. If one can't trust one's friends in a time of difficulty—"

"He's not Dad's friend. And Dad's the only one that matters."

Her mother flashed around at her, hard lines at lips and brows.

"I've always managed to look after my own affairs, Cherry," she said sharply. "I would be much better pleased if you didn't interfere."

Cherry had expected this rebuff and the manner of it but she met her mother's anger with cool insistence.

"You mean then, Muzzy," she said deliberately, "that your intimacy with John Chichester fully justifies this obligation."

Alicia's gaze flickered and then returned to her daughter's face.

"What do you mean?" she gasped.

## ALICIA REVIVES

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"What I say. If Dad is indifferent to what is going on under his nose I'm not—"

"Oh!"

"I might as well tell you what I think. It will clear the air. I know you ought to know better than I do what is the right thing to do. But if you think that spending practically all of your time with John Chichester, both here and in other places, accepting his attentions, forgetting what you owe to Dad, using Chichester's money—"

"Cherry!"

"I mean it. It's rotten of you. I hate to say it but it's true. Upstairs there before I came down, I didn't mean to hear—to see—but I did . . . what he said to you . . . his arm around you—"

The spots of rouge emerged from the sudden pallor of Alicia's face, a tragic mask in motley.

"You listened," she gasped. "You spied!"

"No, I coughed. But you didn't even hear me. I couldn't help that, could I?"

"You were mistaken," stammered Alicia. "It is not true what you say—there was nothing to see—nothing—that you shouldn't have seen!"

"Then why get so excited about it?" said Cherry calmly.

Her mother had crossed the room toward the windows, struggling for her calm.

"It's the way you spoke—the unjust suspicion—from *you*!"



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She turned again, her breast heaving, pacing the floor.

"I don't understand you. Just because I seek relief in occasional pleasure from this horrible atmosphere which suffocates me—you impute these unworthy motives. You shame me—you shame yourself in shaming me. What have I done to deserve this from you? Oh, that you could!"

Her voice had been breaking and suddenly she threw herself upon the sofa sobbing bitterly.

In the old days her tears had always moved Cherry's heart. Cherry was sorry for her now but it was not the pity of affection. It was just pity. Cherry couldn't resist the impression that those tears were not the holy ones of outraged dignity that Alicia wished her to imagine them, but merely the outburst of a childish petulance and anger at having been found out. Alicia had for the moment forgotten that Cherry had seen what she described. Perhaps she wanted to forget it.

"You—you are an unnatural child," she went on wildly. "Haven't I given the b-best years of my life in bringing you up—g-giving you everything in the world to make you h-happy? D-didn't I slave for you all . . . to m-make a place for you in the world? . . . Was it my fault that your father failed? And now you turn against me . . . you to whom I've never denied anything that you wanted—you, who did as you pleased—without question . . . who still do as you please."

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She sat suddenly upright, leaning upon one arm, her hysteria concentrating anew in a reckless abandon of fury.

"You! What right have you to question me—for my harmless pleasures"—she went on—"to put a disgusting motive to a moment of mistaken meaning—you who visit men's apartments at night—"

"Muzzy!"

It was Cherry's turn to be startled. She had fallen back a pace against the mantel staring pallidly at the unnerved woman who faced her with this accusation.

"Well—you see . . . I know," she cried shrilly. "David Sangree. Why you chose him of all men to visit, God knows—"

"Muzzy! Hush! Stop! Do you hear?"

Alicia stared at her for a moment and then bent her head.

The instincts of good breeding came to each of them at the same moment, warned them of the brutality of their meanings. Neither spoke for a moment. Alicia hid her face in her handkerchief sobbing again. Cherry stared at her, dry-eyed, breathing hard, but deathly quiet.

"Who told you this?" Cherry asked at last.

There was no reply and she repeated the question.

"Who told you this? Mr. Chichester?"

"No—yes."

"When?"

"To-night. I didn't believe it. I defended you. But you were seen by friends of his."

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"It's quite true. I did visit David Sangree's room at night."

"Oh!"

"You can impute a rotten motive if you like—" Cherry said and smiled as the thought of David came to her. "Only you don't know David Sangree."

Alicia straightened, still dabbing at her eyes. She looked her age now, for the most of her youth was on her handkerchief. Her face was haggard and mottled with tears.

"I only know that people are talking," she said. Her tones were still cold—resentful—"It was a terrible thing for a decent girl to do—whatever your motive?"

Cherry's reply was obvious but she made none. She only turned away from her mother and leaned with her elbows upon the mantel, her lips compressed. The conversation had passed the bounds of understanding—of decency. She heard the rustle of Alicia's silk underskirt as she rose, gave reply to her formal "good night" and listened to her footsteps as she climbed the stairs. For a long while Cherry stood there, her eyes closed, trying to think. Then, turning out the sputtering gaslight, went heavily up the dark stairway to her room. Her mother . . . and John Chichester. She wouldn't believe it . . . she couldn't. There was but one thing for which she could be thankful—that her father had not heard . . . or seen. . . .

## CHAPTER XX

### WORK

**C**HERRY slept uneasily and awoke unhappy. It seemed after the interview with her mother that something vital had gone out of her life—Perhaps the vestiges of youthful idealism centering around the family as an entity—the spirit of the clan. Her mother had failed them since the hour of their misfortune, which seemed to have robbed her of some intrinsic quality of character that had been hers before. Cherry was startled now to discover how wide was the breach that had grown between them. Yesterday, even, she had been able to think of her mother with a smile of indulgence. To-day she could think only of her father. What she had seen had shocked her and the situation had been brutal. But her severity had been instinctive. She had no regrets for her frankness and expressed none at the breakfast table where her mother joined her showing, as Cherry did, the indications of a restless night. Neither alluded to their conversation which had potentialities for even greater spiritual damage. It was her fear of this which repressed Cherry's one impulse to throw herself into her mother's arms and plead with her for the dignity of the family. But the moment passed. Alicia was icily civil. She had the mind of a child with the manners

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of a woman of the world, and these had always served her with a kind of spurious dignity, impressive to those who did not know her well. It was the attitude of one above reproach intended as a rebuke to her contumelious daughter. Cherry understood and was silent.

Of course Cherry's conscience was clear as to her visit to David's rooms, but that did not rob her mother's revelation of any of its significance. People—men—were talking about her vilely. What hurt her more even than the knowledge that people were talking, was her mother's indifference as to the facts of that visit. Any weapon had served for Alicia's *riposte* and she had chosen it blindly in her rage. Rather childish and silly but none the less hurtful because of that.

In the old days Cherry had done many things almost as indiscreet, dining, supping late, alone with boys, staying out until all hours of the night, and her mother's protests had never been at the most more than perfunctory. But Cherry had already discovered that the change in their fortunes had also changed her relations with the world and the world's with her. In the halcyon days she had been merely a spoiled child doing what she pleased. Now she was a girl with a reputation to lose. Then, she had chosen her friends carelessly and shrugged the rest of the world out of existence. Now, the world seemed to weigh more heavily in the scale against her. It shocked her to discover herself rather conspicuous against the background of her peccadillos. With this choice morsel

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of gossip to their tongues, Cherry already stood condemned.

Fate chose to be ironical. Cherry grinned into the bathroom mirror as she washed out some underclothing. It would have been funny if it weren't so serious. John Chichester had probably known of this for some weeks. Perhaps—! Cherry dropped the garment with a splash, and stared at her surprised image. This morsel of gossip had reached John Chichester's ears—! This now explained why he had never proposed to her! The coincidence was startling. His attentions had suddenly ceased shortly after that visit. And David Sangree, she remembered, had fallen at about the same time, under the ban of his displeasure. Of course! She was almost certain now. Poor Rameses!

In her nature, relic of some forgotten Irish ancestor amenable to the humor of the paradox, a spark of merriment burst forth into flame. She sank to the edge of the bathtub regarding her dripping hands and laughed.

Nature has its safety appliances. The smallest capacity for humor sometimes weighs heavily in the balance against a bitterness, tipping perilously near the edge of despair. She forgot the failures of yesterday in the sardonic picture of her innocence and David's. He had been so startled when she had knocked at his door, so disturbed about his clothing, so austere in his kindness. Such a lover!

And yet it was just those repressions which Cherry

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liked best in him—for they seemed the index of his character and suggested by their negative qualities a sense of force in restraint. He was so sound, so sane, and he had always helped her so much. She would have liked nothing better than to have gone to him now and unburdened herself of her new trouble. But this, of course, was impossible. She could not speak of her mother to any one. . . . The conversation with 'Genie too had made her feel just a little awkward about talking to David and she wondered a little at this, because as far as she could remember she had never been diffident—about anything. She was conscious of shades of sensitiveness with regard to David—with regard to many of her old contacts with life that she had never remembered possessing. . . . She was learning to feel.

Her laughter, bitter as it was, gave her courage. Youth and health were in rebellion against despair. Until the present moment she had failed in everything that she had undertaken, found the true level of her incapacity—with personal problems at home that seemed even more difficult than those of her new struggle for existence. She knew now that any effort to bring her mother to her senses would be wasted—waves of appeal dashing against the rock of Alicia's Ego.

But from her new rough contacts with the world, she had now learned the meaning of David's phrases—she knew what he meant by *the Game*. And so after a while she sought out her father in his room.

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"Dad," she announced cheerfully, "I'm going to work."

Jim Mohun laid aside his pen and turned slowly in his chair. He was silent for a moment regarding her—whimsically she thought at first, then changed her mind. For the flicker of the smile at his lips meant something else when associated with the sudden brightness of his eyes.

"Ah!" he said quietly. "When did you decide that?"

"To-day—this morning—now. You know I've been trying for weeks to get something worth while to do—something that would really help out when the money is gone, but I guess I'm a flivver."

And then in detail for the first time she told him all of her experiences. He listened, making no comment, frowning slightly from time to time as though finding a difficulty in mental concentration. When she finished he took up his extinguished cigar and struck a match.

"And now, my dear—?" he asked.

"A job I was offered at Stacy and Hempel's, twelve a week at first, maybe fifteen later—"

"Doing what?"

"Modeling for 'misses' dresses—and between whiles tying packages—"

"Modeling!"

"Oh, I just walk up and down the aisles in the young ladies' department exhibiting waists and summer frocks. I've got to start in at something. That's



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all I'm fit for. It's taken me six months to find that out. But I know now."

"My dear child, sit down. I want to talk to you. You've been worrying me a great deal. I've had you on my conscience."

"Dad! Why?"

"I feel that I owe you a great debt for the lessons I didn't teach you while you were growing to womanhood—lessons that I had learned—and forgotten."

He puffed a moment on his cigar contemplatively.

"I wonder whether you remember how it was in the old days at Leiperville, before we came to New York. You remember how I used to help you with your arithmetic?"

"Yes, Dad," she laughed. "And I've never learned anything since."

"You remember the problems about how much stone it would take to build a barn, the wallpapering problems that you never could get!"

"Yes, Dad."

"Those were great days. We were happy as bugs in a rug. What a pity—!"

He was silent a moment. "That's the way families cleave together, helping each other—when they're poor. When I made money I let you get away from me. I let your mother turn you over to a lot of strangers. Oh—it wasn't her fault more than it was mine. When I got richer I didn't have the time to give to you. I kept on growing further and further away from you—you and Bob—I didn't realize it. Weeks used to pass

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even before you went to boarding school when I wouldn't even see you. I guess we must have loved each other just as much only we didn't have the chance to show it. . . ."

"Oh, Dad, I always loved you."

He bent his head and closed his eyes.

"And then one day—I woke up—the day you went on that ride with Sangree. It all came over me in a flood, the damage that I'd done you in not being by you, watching your education, having a share in your thoughts—it all came to me, that Sunday—but it was too late. I knew then that Mohun and Company was doomed—that all the things you and Bob were accustomed to would be taken away from you. Of course, I didn't know that I was going to be sick and I thought that I could pull something out of the wreck. But the worst happened. . . ."

"Oh, don't, Dad! Please!"

"I'm coming to what I wanted to say. It's this. No one has a right to bring children into the world unless he fits them to win their way alone and unaided—girls as well as boys—girls more than boys. The higher the type of character, the greater the obligation. I could have done a great deal with you Cherry. You had talents. You had a good mind—too good a mind to be satisfied with the kind of things you did—just because other girls were doing them. . . . Silly things, foolish habits, recklessness, carelessness of public opinion. But I was weak. I listened to your mother. I just let things drift. I didn't realize how little you

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knew, how helpless you would be unless you married—if anything happened. . . . Well it *did* happen. Do you think you can ever forgive me—?”

She caught his hand and kissed it.

“I won’t have you blaming yourself,” she muttered. “If I’d been good for anything, I’d have made good anyway.”

He smiled at her. “You *have* made good, my dear,” he said gently. “You’ve come through.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You’ve won out, Cherry. It doesn’t matter what money you make. It’s what you’ve made of yourself. It isn’t the twelve dollars a week that you’ll earn, it’s the capacity to face the need of earning it. You’ve stood up under the test of disaster. You’ve been game. You’ve never whimpered; you’ve tried your best to put a good face on the situation and make others do so. It isn’t your fault that you’ve failed. It isn’t your fault that you couldn’t find a good job. No matter what happens now, I have no fear for you. . . . I did fear at first. I didn’t realize the kind of stuff that you *were* made of. I’m proud of you, Cherry—proud of you.”

He bent forward and kissed her on the brow, but she turned her head away to hide the tears that trickled down her cheek. She had a feeling that she mustn’t let him see this sign of her weakness, even though her emotion came from the appreciation of his praise. She heard his voice at her ear, going on with a new note of resolution.

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"You can go to work or not as you please, Cherry. I like your spirit. But you needn't worry. There will be more money—soon, I hope. I've got a scheme under way with John Barnett and Harvey Matthison that will do the trick—a new labor-saving device for textile mills. The capital is in sight. People think I'm a dead one—but I'm not. Not yet. I'll make 'em sit up and take notice. You'll see."

"Oh, Dad, I'm so glad!" And then firmly, "But I think I'll be happier working for the present, just the same."

"All right. Go ahead. But I'll bet a thousand—" he broke off with a rueful laugh—"I mean a dollar and a quarter—that you'll be promoted in a week."

But Cherry wasn't promoted in a week—or in two, for Stacy and Hempel's never promoted any girl unless her services became essential. Almost any other pretty girl could have done acceptably what Cherry did.

In the early hours of the morning she helped to put the stock in order, and finished up the odds and ends of business not concluded the day before. At about ten in the morning, when the department filled with shoppers, Cherry put on the new models, one after the other, and sauntered up and down the aisles with a peculiar strut which the woman at the head of the department showed her—a method of locomotion which had originated upon the roof of a midnight theater and was supposed to be both sinuous and guile-

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less. The smile that accompanied it was the "look pleasant" grimace of the photograph gallery. For two hours each morning Cherry thus paraded, for she had what was known as a "misses figure."

As Stacy and Hempel's was a "specialty" shop, its customers were prosperous people and of course it wasn't long before Cherry saw some of her old acquaintances and friends.

She was given again the cut direct by the little profiteer-Carruthers girl—and grinned cheerfully. Mrs. Geoffrey Towne, who had a new *débutante* daughter coming along, was very pleasant and sympathetic for seven seconds, then moved quickly on to the neckwear. Nina Galbraith was desperately cordial in her embraces, exhaling adjectives at every breath.

"*Dear Cherry!* Oh, what a *darling* frock. I heard you were here. You do look *too* adorable. I'm not sorry for you in the least. It must be *wonderful* to be putting on those sweet, new things before any one else can wear them. . . . I've been wanting to call—where is it? one hundred and ninety something?—but it is so hard to get the machine. Do come to see us, won't you? Soon? Good-by, darling." And off she went skurrying into the crowds.

Nina hadn't intended to be patronizing any more than Mrs. Towne had, but Cherry needed no diagram to indicate her position in the eyes of those who had been her acquaintances in former years. But her only reactions from these conversations were some amusement and not a little interest in a side of people's

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characters with which she had been unfamiliar. She didn't see Gloria or Vi. Gloria was too busy "jazzing" she supposed, and Vi, she had heard, had gone to another "rest cure."

The shopping visit of Phoebe Macklin had a different emphasis. Cherry never knew whether it was made by accident or by design. She would have believed it to have been an accident if Phoebe hadn't brought Dicky along. The date of the wedding, it seemed, had been set forward to a month in the early fall, and Phoebe was getting accessories for her trousseau. They were both very frank and friendly, but Cherry gave a gasp of relief when they passed on—Phoebe having bought the frock from Cherry's back. Cherry knew that she deserved this, for there is no intolerance greater than that of one woman for another woman who has refused the man that she has accepted.

But the impression of this visit was not lasting. And 'Genie, who often stopped in at the store, poured balm upon her wounds by declaring that she believed Dicky to be already showing signs of restiveness under Phoebe's light snaffle, and that if Cherry wanted him she could still have him.

But Cherry didn't want Dicky now. He was as unsubstantial as a fairy hero out of a dream. His tinsel had dropped from him. When she had known him in France he had been rather gorgeous. And yet . . . yes . . . something even yet might have been done with Dicky.

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'Genie said nothing more of David Sangree nor did Rameses speak of 'Genie except in the most casual and friendly way. Cherry told him where she was working and several times he met her after hours, walking with her up the Avenue and through the Park. If 'Gene had been trying to "mother" him he gave no sign. Indeed, he had been so busy with his work at the University and upon his new project, of which he had spoken guardedly to Cherry, that he had had little time for society. This project was nothing less than a new scientific expedition into the Near East which he was planning for the following winter. He had bent every energy, used every resource, social and financial, and had finally found all the money necessary to assure its success.

Cherry rejoiced with him because she saw how happy he was, but her pleasure was tempered by the thought that next winter David would leave New York—to be gone for years perhaps. She seemed to feel the need of him now more than ever. . . .

One day, not long after she heard of the great new plan, they sat upon a bench in the Park near the lake. The last nurse maid had left with her charges. Near them were a few old men reading newspapers. David was very quiet and thoughtful. But he answered her questions frankly enough.

"I'm glad, Rameses—" she said. "You must tell me all about these people—the Kurds . . . you said? If it's to be the big work of your life—you know I wish you joy in it."

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"It's what I've planned for years. It's what I would have done with my own money. I was lucky to get people interested—a rich aunt—you've heard me speak of Aunt Mary Sangree—"

Cherry nodded.

"She used to be a great swell—"

"More magnificent than the Chichesters—?"

David made designs in the gravel walk with the ferrule of his umbrella.

"Well rather?" he said with an abstracted air. "The first John Chichester was peddling tobacco when Richard Sangree was Colonial Governor. He owned all this land, the very place where we're sitting. And Aunt Mary has always been very proud of her lineage. Forty years ago she ruled things with a high hand, socially. She is the nearest approach to a *grande dame* that New York has ever known. Still lives in Madison Avenue—the tide of commerce swirling about the old brownstone house. But she won't sell. I don't know how rich she is—she never speaks of money because it's vulgar—but I'm sure she must have millions. She just sits in a little corner of a salon at the rear of the house, on the garden—working at her embroidery—all day long. There she holds her court—people of a bygone day with all the courtliness of a bygone day. But she has her influence still. I must take you to see her, Cherry—a serene, beautiful face—an erect carriage—like a grenadier's. I used to be afraid of her. That's why I took so long to screw up my courage to the point of asking her to help finance my expedition.



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But she gave it—more than I hoped for. And that paved the way for the rest.”

As Cherry made no reply he went on quickly. It was not his habit to talk so much about himself and she wondered what had come over him. It almost seemed as though he were talking against time.

“You see, Cherry, I knew I could not stay at the University the rest of my life. I’m not fitted for teaching. I know just how to do this work. I’ve been preparing for it for years. Bartlett knew that, too, and he’s done everything he could to help me. I’ve got the best scientific backing in the country, so you see I can’t fail. I’ve *got* to succeed.”

“I know you will. You’ve got a new angle to your jaw, Rameses. Dad’s got it too, poor dear. He swears he’s going to show people a thing or two yet.”

“He will. I don’t doubt it. It’s hard to down a man with a courage like his. But then it may take time. In the meanwhile—what becomes of you?”

She laughed confidently.

“I’m going to look out for myself, Rameses,” she said. His gaze sought hers slowly.

“I’ve worried about you a lot, Cherry. That’s a rotten job you’ve got.”

“But I’ve made good at it. I’m getting fifteen next week.”

“Are you? By Jove! I’m glad to hear it,” he said. And then more quietly—“But you were made for something better—”

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"No," she broke in cheerfully. "I proved that I wasn't."

"Nonsense! Luck was against you. See here, Cherry, I'll tell you one of the things I brought you out here to listen to. I came out here to offer you a job—as my secretary at the University until I go away—"

"Rameses!"

"It's not much. Only twenty-five a week, but it will be more congenial than parading before a lot of capacious women and giggling schoolgirls—hours, nine to five—" he went on with a businesslike air—"half day Saturdays. And then when I go perhaps a place in the library."

Cherry bubbled over with excitement.

"If I could do it—!"

"You can. I know what you can do. The money is available next week. Will you accept?"

She halted again in irresolution.

"I want to make good—without help—without favors—"

He laughed.

"If you don't take the job, we'll have to get somebody else—at least *I* will. I wouldn't ask you if I didn't think you were capable."

"You're sure?"

"Yes."

"All right. Then I accept. I've always said you were my guardian angel, Rameses. Now I know it."

"Then that's settled," said Sangree quietly.

She made a motion as though to rise but his hand

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on her arm restrained her. She had noticed his abstracted air and felt in his touch a different meaning. He was clearly very much disturbed.

"There's something else that I've got to say to you, Cherry. Won't you wait a moment?"

She looked at him curiously, her face falling into sober lines. For there was a different note in his voice and his brows were bent in thought.

"Is it any trouble that you are in, David?" she asked slowly.

"No—just the difficulty of telling you. It's something that you ought to know. I just found it out this morning—it was one of the reasons why I had to see you to-day. But it seems difficult somehow—"

"If it's anything that I can do—" she said gently.

"No. It doesn't concern me. It's about some one else—something I heard from George Lycett—"

"Oh!"

He hesitated a moment still poking awkwardly at the gravel with his umbrella.

"Hang it all! It's hard to speak. You know, Cherry, that I wouldn't interfere—I mean, you understand, don't you, that I wouldn't speak if I didn't think that you ought to know?"

A hundred confused thoughts passed through her mind—but she sat motionless watching him, more troubled now than he.

"Then tell me," she said quietly, "if I ought to know."

"It's about your brother Bob—"

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"Bob! Oh, David—what—?"

He put his words together slowly.

"You've had so much trouble," he muttered, "I hate to give you more unhappiness—"

"Go on," she said calmly.

"You would know soon whether I tell you or not. Your brother has been imprudent—reckless—and has made a very bad mistake. I don't suppose there's any use in my mincing words."

"No—go on," gasped Cherry.

"Well, you know Mr. Lycett has an account with Brown and Pritchard, where Bob has a job. They found out this morning that Bob had suddenly disappeared and with his disappearance a sum of money is missing."

A sound came from Cherry's throat—a low, sobbing gasp. He had put off this revelation until the last, speaking at random of other things as he had gathered courage. He did not dare to look at her and went on with difficulty—

"Five thousand dollars—George Lycett's signature—not his own—"

"Forgery! How horrible!" she managed to whisper.

"Bob! I—I can't believe it!"

"I—I'm afraid you must, Cherry," David said softly.

"The evidence is very definite. They found slips of paper in your brother's wastebasket—with George Lycett's name on them—attempts at a perfect signature. Oh, it's all so damned silly of him!"

"What could have made him do such a thing?"

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"Oh, I don't know—debts, I suppose."

"Good God! Poor father—!"

"He mustn't know. There's no reason why he should. They've kept the matter quiet. I was with Mr. Lycett this afternoon. I had a talk with him. I don't think he'll prosecute. And Brown and Pritchard have agreed to wait until they hear something from me."

Cherry was now sobbing quietly.

"Don't, Cherry dear. Please don't. I think the whole thing can be arranged, if we can only find Bob. Do you know where he is?"

Cherry looked up bewildered. "No—I don't."

"Was he at home last night?"

She hesitated.

"Now that you speak of it—I—I don't think he was," she gasped. "I haven't seen him for almost a week. . . ."

She struggled for her composure and then straightened with an effort.

"But how can such a thing be arranged? How—can it? Oh! It's unbelievable."

"Your brother is very young—" said David gently. "He has not been keeping the best of company. I'm sure the whole affair can be kept quiet—if we can only find the boy."

"But how? How can we pay back a sum like that?"

"Oh, that may be managed—" said David.

Cherry turned on him.

"You—David! I won't let you do that. Never! Never!"

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He did not look at her and only poked gravely with his umbrella into the gravel, but he felt her startled gaze upon him, and then the touch of her fingers on his arm.

"David! David!" was all that she could say.

She struggled hard to master her emotions and after a moment she straightened suddenly, her fingers still on David's arm, and then rose.

"I've got to be going home, David—home—at once. I'm a little bewildered still. I've got to think what to do—about father."

She spoke, still in a daze, her fingers clinging to his arm as they went across to the subway station. But with the exercise she gathered strength and courage. He wanted to go uptown with her but she insisted on going alone.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE HOUSE OF MOHUN

**C**HERRY did not know how she managed to reach home with a manner of outward composure. She was aware that she suffered tortures of mind and yet was conscious that in the subway car she examined the advertising signs as usual—the collar advertisement of the boy with the straw-colored hair, the food advertisement of the fried eggs on the ham which had always looked so appetizing to her on the way home from down town—and the others of soaps, of washing machines, of stockings, of underwear. . . . The unintelligible cries of the guards, the roar of the train, the jostling of the crowds—she was conscious of all externals—and yet her mind hammered persistently at the one name—Bob, Bob, Bob. Her brother—he had been such a lovable boy—a little spoiled perhaps, but without real harm in him . . . good looking—always immaculate—like the boy in the collar advertisement—Bob!

Nor did she know how she managed to join her father at the dinner table without betraying her secret. His newly-found assurance and his cheerfulness even made her burden more difficult to bear. How could this news be kept from him? How could she cope with these new difficulties alone?

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Women dissimulate with more skill than men. What Cherry seemed to need most was time in which to think and plan. And so with an effort that was not apparent to Jim Mohun she told him of David Sangree's offer of the position as his assistant and of her doubts as to her capability. But he reassured her.

"If you *must* work, I'm better satisfied to have you with Sangree," he said. "You'll do well. If you need brushing up—a few months at night in a business school—"

"Yes, I might do that," she said quietly. "There are library courses too. But I'm afraid Dr. Sangree is only offering the job out of friendship."

"Perhaps he is. But I don't think he'll mind having you about," he said whimsically. "You know, Cherry, I've never thought that Dr. Sangree's interest in you was altogether scientific."

Cherry looked up from her plate; then contemplated her rice pudding soberly.

"Dear old David!" she muttered. And then, "He's the best friend—except you, Dad—that I've got in the world."

After dinner her father took out his cigar. Cherry brought the matches and lighted it for him. It was a pleasant little formality to which they had recently become accustomed. In the parlor they sat on the sofa hand in hand. Jim Mohun talked bravely of his plans while Cherry listened trying to stifle the pain in her breast which seemed on the point of bursting. Neither of them commented upon the absence of



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Alicia, whose engagements now frequently called her to dine elsewhere. Mohun thought that Cherry's silence was the silence of happiness and understanding. It seemed to him that life had taken on a brighter color for them both—and that whatever the world had in store for them, they were at least blessed in each other.

A sudden commotion in the street outside which they heard clearly through the open window, the lights of an automobile in the dusk—the sounds of voices—and the banging of the door of a limousine. Cherry rose and went to the window.

"It's Muzzy and John Chichester," she said quietly.

A shadow fell across Jim Mohun's brow. He rose heavily. "I think I'll be going up, Cherry," he said.

But before he could cross to the door Alicia had entered the room. It was at once apparent to her daughter that she knew everything about Bob's affair, for Alicia's eyes were wide and dry, the color spots upon her cheeks isolated. Cherry glanced at her father whose quick eyes had already caught the signs of disquiet in his wife's appearance. And behind her in the dim hallway, father and daughter had a glimpse of Chichester's grave expression.

"Don't, Muzzy! Don't!" Cherry appealed quickly.

But Alicia's glance passed Cherry—ignored her.

"Jim!" she said haltingly, directly to her husband.

"Something has happened—"

"Muzzy!" Cherry caught her mother's arm.

"Muzzy, come up stairs. I know about it. But it's

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all right. It's all been arranged—I'll tell you." And then with an air of calmness. "Come in, Mr. Chichester. My father will—"

Cherry halted as she heard her father's voice behind her, calmly incisive.

"One moment, Cherry!" His brows were puckering in an effort at concentration.

"It's really nothing, Dad—something about *me* that Muzzy doesn't understand—" she gasped. "I'll tell you about it to-morrow."

"No," he muttered. And then. "Wait, please, Cherry." He seemed now to have himself under perfect control, but his gaze had not for a moment left his wife's face. "Alicia!" he commanded.

"Please, Dad—" whispered Cherry, her hand on his arm.

But he thrust her gently aside.

"Speak, Alicia! What is it?"

"Something terrible has happened—Oh, Jim!" A sob came into her throat and choked her. There was a moment of silence.

"Go on—is it something about Cherry?"

"No, no. It's Bob," she gasped. "Bob has—" Her voice broke and she turned away wringing her hands. Jim Mohun was leaning forward on his cane—fixed like an image of stone.

"Won't you speak out?" he demanded jerkily. "What of Bob—?"

The situation was out of Cherry's hands. Her mother turned toward them again struggling for her

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courage and gave her message with desperate speed.

"Bob has taken money—forged—a check. They found it out this morning. Oh, God!"

A motion from the man at Cherry's side. Sounds in his throat—dull repetitions of Alicia's words. Cherry saw him moisten his lips and straighten with an effort as his wife went on.

"Mr. Chichester came with me—to ask your permission to straighten the matter out—to get Bob out of this trouble—to repay the amount—five thousand dollars—!"

"Five thousand!" repeated Mohun, parrotlike.

Alicia sank heavily into a chair as Chichester spoke in carefully modulated tones, "I was hoping you'd grant me the privilege of helping you. I want you to know that any influence that I possess, Mr. Mohun, in keeping this matter quiet is entirely at your service."

Cherry watched her father anxiously. As Chichester spoke, she saw him straighten with some of the old squareness and bulk of shoulder and jaw. His brows were bent and his eyes shot a sudden fire.

It seemed to Cherry that in that glance was concentrated the righteous ire of weeks of silent recriminations—as though he had come to judgment upon this man and woman and was ready to pronounce it before them all. But he governed himself with an effort—and when he spoke it was with an icy civility.

"Thanks," he said tersely. "I appreciate the meaning of your offer. But I won't take advantage of it." He glanced meaningly at his wife who had started in

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her chair at the deep note in his voice. "And as this is entirely a family matter," he went on, "perhaps, Mr. Chichester, you won't mind—" He paused with a commanding look toward the door.

"Oh!"

Chichester flushed uncomfortably. "Er—of course, I understand." Then he turned awkwardly. "Er—good night, Mr. Mohun—!"

"Good night," said Mohun, dryly.

He did not move, but to Cherry he seemed to have gathered weight and authority. He was the man as she remembered him in earlier days when they had first come to New York—a personality, a force to be reckoned with.

She heard the sound of the machine departing, then her mother's gasp at her side.

"Jim! You were discourteous—unpardonably so! Especially as Mr. Chichester has been so kind—"

"Discourteous!" He smiled grimly as he turned toward her. "This is no time for meddlers—"

"Meddlers?" she gasped. "Mr Chichester is—"

"I think I know what Mr. Chichester is," he cut in harshly. "I'm quite capable of settling the personal affairs of this family without his help." And then sharply, "When did you hear of this?"

"This—this morning. Mr. Chichester was Bob's bondsman. We've spent most of the day trying to find out where he is. Mr. Chichester was very kind—"

"And you failed to find him?"

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"He's gone, Jim," she wailed—"I'm afraid—out of the city. I suppose he was afraid to face the firm—" "Oh!"

Mohun hobbled to the window and back, his face working with passion. Cherry caught at his arm to try to make him sit down but he did not seem to be aware of her. He stopped at last before his wife who was still weeping gently.

"Gone is he? Gone! I hope to God he never comes back."

"Dad! Don't speak so." Cherry faltered painfully. "He has been weak—foolish, crazy if you like, but—"

He cut her short with a commanding gesture.

"A thief!"

"Dad!"

"Jim!"

"A thief. That's the name for him—I'll have none of your subterfuges. My son—a thief—a stupid one into the bargain. A thief and a fool."

Cherry too was sobbing now.

"Dad—please!" she pleaded.

He didn't seem to hear her voice or to feel the gentle touch of her hand upon his shoulder. He stood leaning forward on his stick confronting his wife who still bent her head as though afraid to meet his gaze. There was a heavy note in his voice now, growing in depth and volume as though from forces long pent. Perhaps his wife recognized some forgotten note of authority or perhaps she was merely weary or frightened

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for she stirred and rose—"Jim, I—I can't stand it," she muttered. "I—I think I'll go to my room."

"No," he growled harshly, "you'll listen!" He thrust out a hand. It did not touch her, but with one look into his eyes she shrank back to her chair again in obedience. "However this has happened," he snapped at her, "it's your fault as well as mine—and you'll share the responsibility. It won't help either of us to go out of the room. That's the way you've always ended our discussions—you'd never listen to me when I talked, but you've got to listen now—"

"You're brutal," she said with an effort at self-command.

"Because I tell you a few plain truths. It's time I did. Perhaps there's time yet to save you from being the kind of a fool that I was—the kind of a fool who believes that wealth and social position are the only things to be got out of life. I wanted the one, you wanted the other, but you couldn't have what you wanted unless I got what *I* wanted. . . . Well, I got it for you. You got everything you wanted—so did I—But in the getting we lost the only thing that matters in a family—the confidence of our children—their welfare, their love—"

"Dad! That's not true. . . ."

He went on regardless, reverting, in his obsession, to the language—to the frankness of an earlier and healthier day.

"Maybe it was my fault more than yours. I ought to have made you do what I wanted. I ought to have

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made you find out what our children were doing. I ought to have made you live within your means. I ought to have kept the family together. But so ought you. That was your job as well as mine. But we didn't—either of us. We were too busy—you making people think you were better than you were—me making people think I had more money than I had."

"I will not listen to you—"

She rose, but he hobbled in front of her barring her way.

"Yes, you'll listen to me," he muttered. "It's ten years since you did last. I've done a lot of thinking since I've been sick—about my failure—about the family—about you! I've been hoping that something might still be saved from the wreck, something bigger and better than mere money and social position. I hoped that Bob was learning what life meant—as Cherry has been learning. I hoped that *you* might get tired of chasing your will o' the wisp and learn what your duty was to us all."

"Jim!" she cried hysterically. "I've only tried to get a few moments of relaxation—of relief from my thoughts. I've done no harm—done nothing wrong."

He laughed harshly.

"It all depends on the point of view. I don't blame Mr. Chichester. Almost any man will make a fool of himself when a pretty woman demands it of him."

"Wh—what do you mean?" she gasped.

He shrugged and then, dryly, but with merciless precision he told her.

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"One night three weeks ago you came home with Chichester from a drive into the country. Cherry was in bed and asleep. You thought I was too. I wasn't. I heard your voices. You were saying good night—in Chichester's arms."

"Dad!" cried Cherry in horror as she realized that he had known what she knew.

Alicia's face, already streaked with tears, went ghastly. She stared at him.

"Jim!—you—!"

"I would have shot him if I had had a gun. I'm glad I hadn't. He isn't worth it." He laughed again. "I went to bed."

His wife tried to speak, fumbled for the arm of her chair and sank heavily into it. Cherry thought that she had fainted, but at her daughter's touch she seemed to withdraw into herself, listening in terror to the deadly monotone of Jim Mohun's voice as he completed his indictment.

"I'll do you the credit of saying that I don't believe you've gone the limit. You haven't got courage enough for that. I hope he wants to marry you. If he doesn't you've just made a fool of yourself. . . ." He laughed again. It wasn't pleasant laughter, but Alicia Mohun shuddered as though each harsh note of its ridicule had been a brutal blow. Then, suddenly he stopped. "Oh, I'll give you your divorce," he said. "Perhaps there's something about your artificialities that appeals to what's left of the wreck of him—perhaps—"



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Cherry closed her ears to the further brutality, between anguish and despair. Her mother did not move. The sound of her father's words grew slower, poised on the edge of a deathly silence. . . . She saw him start and fall more heavily upon his cane as his gaze shot past her mother to a figure that had entered the hallway and stood outside the door in the shadow. It was Bob. He was gray—haggard—and his hair and clothes were disordered. Cherry called his name and would have rushed to him, but her father caught her by the arm, as Alicia, startled, rose and faced him.

"Muzzy, I've got to go away suddenly," said the boy. "I came to get some clothes. . . ."

"Bob!"

"Silence!" The voice of the head of the House of Mohun dominated—mastered them. Bob Mohun, blinking foolishly, stepped back as his father stumbled a pace forward toward him, his eyes like hot coals, his face writhing as though a hundred devils were working at it. He stretched out an accusing arm which ended by groping aimlessly in space, a physical, a spiritual groping upward as though for freedom.

"You—you!" he thundered. "You dare to come home here to me! You dare! You think you can wheedle money out of your mother or her friends to help you." He turned to his wife and daughter—"Well, I forbid it! D'ye hear? Not a dollar—even if I had it. You'll take your punishment like a man—like I took mine. I may have been a fool, but there's no man on earth who can say I was ever in a question—

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able transaction. I played the game fair. You didn't get that streak of yellow from my blood—from my example." He paused in a brief, terrible effort to regain his breath. "You! My son. Forger! Thief! You're not my son. I'll have none of you. Go! Leave the house! D'ye hear? Go. . . ."

He tried to go on but no words came—only a strange distortion of his purpling face. And even as Cherry ran toward him he tottered—suspended in the air like a dynamited factory chimney. She caught at him and as he fell he dragged her down with him.

"Dad!" she whispered in horror, and then, "Dad!" she screamed. For dimly, somewhere in the back of her mind came the remembrance of the Doctor's phrase, "No worry, mind! It's the second stroke you have to fear!"

## CHAPTER XXII

### NEW LIFE

**F**OR three weeks Cherry had been constantly in the thoughts of David Sangree. He had gone to the house as soon as he had heard of her father's death. 'Genie was with her, quietly cheerful and sympathetic, and ready to help her in her few melancholy preparations. There was nothing, it seemed, that David could do; for the affairs of the household were in charge of John Barnett. It was from 'Genie that he learned briefly of the facts as far as she knew them, which had led to Mohun's death—from Barnett of Mrs. Mohun's dependence upon John Chichester who had taken Bob's affair in hand at her request and kept the facts out of the newspapers. It was obvious that powerful influences had operated to spare the boy and reimburse the firm of Brown and Pritchard, which, as David later heard from Lycett, declined to prosecute. Bob Mohun, now conscience-stricken and terrified, had been sent out of town.

It seemed to David that Cherry had agreed to all of these things because she possessed no longer any power of initiative. She seemed stunned by the repeated blows, and, when he spoke to her of other things, she listened to him, but with a distant gaze as though she were trying to pierce some impenetrable veil, to find the

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answer to some question to which there was no answer. He did not learn until later of the alienation of mother and daughter, nor of its cause. But the continued frequency of John Chichester's visits and the celerity with which Bob's unfortunate affair had been arranged left no room for doubt as to the real nature of their relations.

Chichester's manner to Sangree when they met was now extremely cordial, an attitude which Sangree returned, as he had always done, with a casual air of good breeding. But he had never liked Chichester and made no effort to conciliate him, reflecting perhaps even a slight air of resentment which he had absorbed from Cherry.

'Genie came with an invitation from Mrs. Gartley to spend a few weeks at her country place, Walhalla, up the Hudson, and Cherry, glad of the opportunity for a rest and change of thoughts, accepted. There was nothing to keep her in the house in One Hundred and Eighty-second Street. It was no longer a home. It was just a house. Her plans were agreeable to her mother who immediately accepted an invitation of Mrs. Pennington to spend a month on Long Island.

Sangree went on with his work, still thinking of Cherry. The Gartleys invited him to Walhalla for the week-ends and he saw that the change of scene had benefited her. She was still rather quiet, but a color had come back into her cheeks and she gave him a welcome which left no doubt as to the warmth of her friendship. She wanted to go to work at the Uni-

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versity at once, but David agreed with 'Genie that another week at Walhalla was what Cherry needed most.

David worked hard but at odd moments he found himself relaxing in his chair, his papers before him, his gaze on vacancy, thinking of Cherry. Should he tell her how things were with him? He knew that she was greatly changed from the flamboyant creature of his first acquaintance; that Bruce Cowan and Dicky Wilberforce had passed rather obtrusively from the field of her sentimental vision (for she had laughingly described her disillusionments); that in the rigors of the Game of Life which they had frequently discussed she had found herself at last, a woman grown, aware of the lesser hypocrisies, but still loyal to herself and full of faith in ideals which had persisted in spite of influences which might easily have destroyed them. The material records of this faith were not many, but Sangree meant before he sailed that she should be adequately provided with opportunities to succeed and he knew now that she could not fail to justify his confidence in her.

But as the plans for the new expedition worked out and the day of his sailing became more definite, the many miles of land and water which would separate him from Cherry took a most unpleasant aspect. He was quite sure that the thought of himself as a lover or a possible husband had never entered Cherry's mind. More than this, he realized now that in her ambition to succeed—of which he had been more or less the in-

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centive—he had erected a formidable barrier to any sentimental attachment.

But it had become more difficult for him to think of Cherry in terms of personal detachment, and, while the pity that he had for her in her continued misfortunes still kept him silent, it was that very pity which drove him to his decision to offer himself before he sailed. Six months ago even the thought of such an offer would not have been possible—a few thousand dollars, with little chance of making more—these were hardly prospects sufficiently attractive to offer to a girl who had been brought up as Cherry had.

He was a little startled at the temerity of his thoughts—a little abashed, too, at the persistence of his egotism which, in spite of foredoomed failure, still urged a declaration. But after all, it was he that would suffer and, even in failure, he now felt sure that it would make him a little happier just to know that Cherry was certain of the real nature of his devotion.

Three days after his last visit to the Gartleys, he was working in the basement of the American Museum of Natural History, unpacking some cases of specimens which had at last reached New York—the final fruits of his last war-time researches in Asia Minor. It was a part of his duty before he left on the new expedition to see that these objects were properly classified and permanently placed in the Museum. The day was hot but he worked like a beaver, in his shirt sleeves, perspiring freely, armed with screw driver, nail pull and hatchet, for he had himself packed these

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cases in the East and he did not dare to trust their unpacking to impious hands. His interest in the objects, as he drew them forth one by one from their straw, was intense—for each specimen had a history, each represented a definite adventure, a definite triumph. He had the joy of the painter or sculptor in his completed masterpieces, for this collection, as he knew, represented the end of one period of his scientific life, and was, in fact, a splendid contribution to the knowledge of the world.

He straightened when the last case was opened to wipe the dust and moisture from his brow and to fill and light his pipe while he gazed absorbed at the orderly array of ancient utensils upon the wooden shelves.

A voice almost at his side and a familiar laugh.

"Hello, Rameses."

"Cherry! What on earth—?"

"They sent me here from your office. I've found you out at last."

"I'm delighted to see you—"

"I've come to work," she announced.

"But I thought you were to stay at Walhalla the rest of the week!"

"Oh, I couldn't wait. I thought I might help with the cataloguing."

"You can, of course, if you're quite sure you want to."

"I do. At once, Rameses. Tell me where to begin and I'll show you how efficient I mean to be."

Sangree laughed.

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"Good! I haven't a doubt of you. To-morrow you shall begin. For the present, I'm quite content to spend an hour just looking at you."

She flushed with pleasure.

"You're really glad to have me here?"

"I think you know that," he said quietly.

"Yes, I think I do. But I don't mind your telling me."

"If I told you how glad I was—er—well—" he stopped suddenly. "I don't think I'd better—not just now."

"H—m," said Cherry, quite composedly.

He stole another glance at her. Youth had triumphed. She was sound and well again mentally and physically. He hadn't seen her looking so handsome for months—and she had a new poise—not the one of arrogance and self-sufficiency which had first impressed him, but rather the quiet confidence and courage of one who has found herself.

She was smiling half whimsically when she spoke again.

"You know, Rameses, I've been a little worried about coming to work for you. I shan't be worth—at least at first—what you're going to pay me. And, of course, I know you've given me this job out of friendship—"

"There's no reason—" he began.

"Wait a moment. I don't say that I can't make good, I don't see why I can't if I'm willing to learn. And I mean to work hard—to justify your faith in



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me. I'd do that anyhow. I've got to do that. Because it was really you that kept me going—kept me thinking straight. I can never repay you for what you've done for me—never—except in making good at the Game."

"You've already done that."

"No. Not yet," she said quietly. "But I'm going to. And I don't want you to show me any favors. I don't want you to be afraid of working me too hard. I won't be a quitter. And I'll be happy if I can be a real help to you. I've already begun at stenography, and I've arranged to attend some night classes—"

"Oh! Have you?"

She nodded.

"You see, Rameses," she said quietly, "I want to make myself so necessary to you that you won't employ anybody else—"

"There's no danger of that, Cherry. Not that danger. But there is a danger. I'm afraid—"

He halted, examining the bowl of his extinguished pipe, and then went on jerkily—"Oh, hang it all, Cherry! I've got to tell you." His voice had sunk to a deep note and vibrated uncertainly. "I've been wanting to tell you—for—for a long time—Cherry—but I was afraid—it might make you unhappy—might make some difference in our friendship—but it needn't. In a month or two, I'll be going away and then of course—"

He broke off again. He was making bad weather of

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it. Cherry had risen and stood, her head bent away from him.

"I—I don't want you to go, Rameses," she said.

"Do—do you mean that you care?"

Her head turned toward him and her lashes were moist.

As he took her hand she slowly raised her head so that David could read her answer in her eyes.

"Cherry!" he whispered gently. "Do you?"

Her head nodded decisively.

"I do, Rameses, I—I always have—I think."

At the touch of his arm she stirred a little and then settled gently into his arms, her lips to his, the miracle accomplished. And there, among the household gods of an ancient race, they repeated the formula which is as old as Time itself.

. . . . .

"You see, Rameses," she said later as they walked over to the University, "after that visit to your rooms you just *had* to marry me."

He laughed delightedly. "I'm beginning to believe that you knew that I was going to propose to you."

"Exactly," she said demurely whimsical. "I came down from Walhalla to offer you the opportunity."

"And you *knew*?" he asked.

"Rameses, dear, would you have me as much of a mummy as you?"

. . . . .

There being no impediment that either could dis-

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cover had they wished to do so, Cherry and David arranged to marry in September. In her newly-found happiness she still found it in her heart to be resentful of her mother's marriage to John Chichester which was performed very quietly in Baltimore less than two months after James Mohun's death. The inevitable criticism of her haste was based largely upon the supposition that Alicia feared that she might lose her Demi-John. When they returned to live at Roslyn Towers, until the town house was opened, Cherry did not accept the invitation to visit them. Perhaps some day, when time had worn the edges from her sorrow and pity, she could forgive Alicia—but not yet. . . .

The example set by Cherry was too much for 'Genie Armitage, who drove down to the University with Willy Rossiter in the Gartley runabout and proclaimed herself blissfully happy.

"You see," she said confidentially to Cherry, "his Adam's apple doesn't wiggle nearly as much as it used to. It was just nervousness—about me—I think."

Aunt Mary Sangree who had taken a fancy to her nephew's fiancée spoke her mind to Cherry about everything under the sun with the greatest of freedom. But when Cherry, rather ruefully, brought the news of her mother's wedding to the Madison Avenue house, she fairly outdid herself in indignation.

"I would not care to offend your sensibilities, my dear child," she said in her crisp grenadier accents, "and I hope you'll pardon me when I say that your mother

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is the product of this new age which storms so successfully at all the bulwarks of respectability—an age which contents itself with the symbols of happiness without happiness itself—which defies tradition and violates precedent; which lives only in materiality; which ignores the existence of the spiritual and is deaf to all appeals except those of the body. An age, my dear, of restlessness and discontent while the Devil finds many idle hands to do his bidding. If young girls go straight, it's not because they are taught to do so; if they go crooked it's just because they're frail creatures whom no one could help.

“You were very badly brought up, my dear. If your mother had cared as much for your soul as she did for her own body, you would have had a better chance. But then you probably wouldn't have met David. I don't envy your mother her husband—John Chichester was always a nasty boy. . . .”

She stopped for a second and extending her hand patted Cherry gently on the knee. “But ‘all's well that ends well,’” she went on. “I believe in you, Cherry. David is lucky. But then so are you. I shall give you a wedding breakfast in this house and I shall ask the people that you should meet. But if you'll pardon the fancy of a captious and irritated old lady, the Chichester family shall not be invited. . . .”

Cherry sat silent watching the gnarled old fingers as they moved with incredible skill at her embroidery. Hers was the voice of an age long dead, but, whatever her own opinions, Cherry was forced to admit that

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Mrs. Sangree's ideas were based upon a rational philosophy.

At this moment the old lady's sharp eyes caught the look of abstraction in the eyes of her visitors.

"There—" she said—"I am an old fossil, David. Take this girl into the drawing-room and make love to her. Perkins will see that you are not disturbed."



